

# TEEVADHARA

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION



THEORY AND PRACTICE

THE DIALECTICS OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

*Gotthold Hasenhuettl*

THE DIALECTICS OF BELIEF AND LIFE

THE NEED FOR A NEW ORIENTATION IN THEOLOGY

*John Arakkal*

SOCIAL COMMITMENT AND THEORETICAL MOTIVATION

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CHURCH'S DEVELOPMENTAL

ACTIVITIES IN KERALA

*François Houtart and Geneviève Lemercinier*

CHRISTIAN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

A CASE STUDY OF THE KERALA CHURCH'S POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

*Mathew Kanjirathinkal*

THE INDIAN IDEOLOGY

REMARKS ON MANU'S DEFENCE OF THE CASTE SYSTEM

*John Arakkal*



V. 31-36

1976

*Jeevadhara* is published in two editions,  
English and Malayalam

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# The Problem of Man

## THEORY AND PRAXIS

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# Editorial

Theory and praxis are related to one another. It is also clear that the one is not exactly the same as the other. But the way both are related is not immediately evident. Is the relationship something basic, essential, constitutive? Which of the two, theory or praxis, is the primary dimension of man's being? Is man first and foremost knowledge, conviction, belief, contemplation or is he pre-eminently action, behaviour, life, realisation? What is the beginning and end of man's fulfilment? Is it gnosis, *jñāna* or praxis, karma? Is it to be conceived as a beatific vision, *sākṣātkāra* or as eternal joy, *ānanda*? Or, could it be that we pose the question wrongly, – that we should see the whole thing in a different light?

The problem would seem to be of more than mere “academic” interest, nor is it merely of pragmatic concern. For what is true of theory and praxis would apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to several related areas or dimensions of man's life: it would affect man's knowledge and action, his word and his deed, his belief and life.

In an orientative essay, Gotthold Hasenhüttl studies the different responses the problem has evoked in the course of Western thought and suggests the direction in which a solution may be found. Both ancient and medieval thought accords theory a certain priority over praxis while modern pragmatism reverses the emphasis and makes praxis the criterion of theory. This subordinates either theory to praxis or praxis to theory, and inhibits the *free* development of both and thus the *real*, i.e., free self-fulfilment of man. Only where theory and praxis are seen as *dialectically* related to each other do we avoid binding our freedom, both of thought and action, to an enslaving “authority” and realize our true identity in the unity of doing as well as



knowing. Theory and praxis may be properly understood and really mediated only by means of "a critical and maximally free decision which is responsibly communicative". In the Christian tradition, Jesus Christ is a model who has realized this self-fulfilling unity of word and deed, theory and praxis.

Given the relativity of religions and philosophies, it would be necessary to ask how the problem is seen in other traditions. For instance, how is the Indian *jñāna*, knowledge related to karma, action? At least some Indian traditions would seem to accord a kind of priority to *jñāna*. If *jñāna* is *the way* to self-realization, if this self-realization is liberation, *mokṣa* or *mukti*, from births and rebirths, what value has our this-worldly activity with its thousand and one chores of love and work and nation-building? Does it not divert us from "the one thing necessary" (cf. Lk 10:42)? Sociological investigations are necessary to determine whether the alleged Indian "apathy" is due to this "theoretical" accent or whether it is due to our living and working in an enervating "Continent of Circe" (cf. Nirad Choudhary). Though this is an extremely important issue, we have to be content with this hint for the time being. Similarly, it would have been necessary to investigate the practical impact of the monastic emphasis on contemplation as opposed to action or the Thomistic accent on the intellect in Christianity, or the consequences of a static view of *ṛta* and *dharma* or of a deterministic karma in Hinduism.

Of course, there are opposite views in both traditions that may neutralise or overcome the not so healthy emphasis mentioned above, and both Hindu and Christian theologies have every right to stress and develop those aspects of their traditions that seem true and valid. This brings us to the problem of interrogating such concrete and historical realities as religions as to their truth and relevance for man today and tomorrow. I have tried to indicate some of the risks involved in this by analysing the picture some of the more open and critical of contemporary theologians - Karl Rahner and Hans Küng from the Catholic tradition and Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg from the Protestant tradition - give of Christianity. The positive and inviting image theology projects of Christianity seems to result from a questionable procedure. It consists in a tactical, apologetic or applic-



ationalist retreat to an "essential" or "original" Christianity by means of a *selective appropriation and reinterpretation* of what seems to be true and relevant in the Christian traditions. Even the more open and critical directions in theology have a tendency to exempt a certain core of belief from the process of the theory-praxis dialectics and to immunise it against critical scrutiny. Thus, the *abstract* and *idealized* theory of Christianity which theology formulates is in many ways scientifically inadequate, and liable to ideological applications. Not that theology can or may recommend all that is in the Christian, even in the biblical traditions for belief and practice. It may not. But it should frankly admit the selective and interpretative nature of what it presents as the Christian *ideal* to be lived and criticize openly the negative aspects of Christian theory and praxis, instead of quietly dismissing them. To be true to its professed *scientific* intent, theology would have to investigate *critically* the *whole* of Christian reality as to its meaning, truth and relevance, taking into account the whole of its belief and life in terms of theory-praxis dialectics. Only a truly scientific theology will be of real use to the Church and the world.

To understand what Christianity really *is* and what it *can* and *should be*, it is necessary that theology should attend more to the *reality of Christian Praxis* than is usually the case. This would require historical, sociological and psychological inquiries. The two case studies that follow investigate the dialectics of Christian theory and praxis from a sociological point of view. Both restrict themselves to a small South Indian state - Kerala. For all its peculiarities, the Kerala situation has much in common with that of other parts of India, probably also that of other developing nations. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from the Church's behaviour in Kerala are likely to be of wider interest.

Geneviève Lemercinier and François Houtart submit the results of their study of the developmental activities of the Catholic Church in Kerala. The research was organised on the initiative of the Pastoral Orientation Centre, Cochin, with the approval of the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Conference and the co-operation of the Centre for Socio-Religious Studies of the Catholic University of Louvain. The authors draw attention to the service the Church has rendered in the fields of charity, re-



lief, education and public health. In fact, the Church's social action is envisaged "mainly in terms of charitable work for the poor in order to solve the problems of illiteracy, lack of health and socio-economic underdevelopment. The main aim has been to cure the poor of such diseases, rather than to organize society in such a way that they would no longer be the victims of an oppressive system... With a few exceptions, this accounts for the Church's open or latent opposition to movements of liberation, like movements of landless peasants, trade unions, etc". The interests of its institutions inhibit the Church from exercising a critical function as regards human emancipation. In fact, many of its activities and institutions tend to serve the needs of the relatively "rich" rather than those of the poor who constitute the majority of Kerala's population. Thus, the Church helps in effect to widen rather than close the socio-economic gap. It is, therefore, necessary that the Church becomes aware of the wider, socio-political dimension of poverty and misery and adopt a real "pedagogy of liberation", aimed at changing the structures of oppression. This would require a re-thinking of the Church's mission, its action at the macro level of society and that at the micro level.

On the basis of an analysis of Kerala's political development in the last two decades Mathew Kanjirathinkal uncovers the basic interests that have governed the Church's activity in this sphere. It is generally admitted that caste and communalism have played a decisive role in Kerala's politics in recent times. In fact, the Church too has understood itself as a *caste*, anxious to preserve its rights and privileges. However, it would seem that the Church was concerned more about the interests of the moneyed and influential sections of its members and the interests of its institutions than about those of the *whole* community. The dualistic view with its separation of heaven and earth, soul and body, spirituality and politics, seems to have provided the Church with an alibi for its inaction in the face of oppression and inhumanity. As a rule, the Church in Kerala has been politically active only when its own interests were at stake. The material and ideological dependence of the Indian Church on the Western nations has shaped her attitude towards movements of emancipation. For instance, communism is for many nothing more than the "in-



human atheism" of capitalistic propaganda. Kanjirathinkal closes with the plea that the Church should not remain indifferent to politics, but should actively participate in them, especially in defence of the legitimate rights of the poor and exploited. "A principled political commitment seems to be the best guarantee against a politics of opportunism and self-interest."

Finally, there are a few remarks on Manu's defence of the caste system, meant to draw attention to an important *ideological* component of Indian thought. It shows how even the most inhuman practices may be religiously legitimised and stabilised.

That theory and praxis are dialectically related to one another means that criticism of a theory is not only welcome but also necessary. This applies to all the "theories" proposed in this issue of *Jeevadhara*.

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# The Dialectics of Theory and Praxis

## I. The primacy of theory

Anthropology, especially Western anthropology lays emphasis on the duality of human life. This is expressed in terms of the duality of intellect and will, for man realizes himself as a thinking and willing being. Both these aspects are united in the "anima", the life-principle of the "animal rationale". Though the knowledge of things, the truth, is a process and thus a realization, it is in fact considered different from action itself.

Knowing and willing are two areas, of which the one is understood as the realisation of contemplation, *theoria*, and the other as practice (production), *praxis* (poesis). The grasping of truth is different from the grasping of an object. Even though both are realizations of rational beings, the pure (theoretical) reason is not in fact identical with the practical reason. The science of action (ethics) is not the science of being (ontology) or the science of knowledge (gnoseology, epistemology).

The distinction between these dimensions is not controverted, even where there is a close co-ordination of theory and praxis.

On the other hand, the question of primacy remains controversial. Which dimension discloses the meaning of man? Is he primarily the will, realization, deed (in the beginning was the deed), or is he pre-eminently knowledge, reflection, the comprehension of truth (in the beginning was the word, the *logos*)?

The controversy begins with Plato and Aristotle, permeates the whole of medieval scholasticism (Thomas Aquinas - Bonaventure, Dun Scotus: the whole Dominican school on the one hand and the Franciscan school on the other) and has determined modern philosophy up to the nineteenth century (Hegel-Kierkegaard). Catch-words like intellectualism and voluntarism eluci-



date the problem in a simplified way. The First Vatican Council sided with Thomas's viewpoint against the traditionalist tendencies by allotting to the will only an impeding or facilitating function as regards the knowability of God. Here, theoretical knowledge of God, e. g., has no essential relation to praxis. The separation of the two areas as far as man's life-problems are concerned takes on extreme forms in such speculations. The mediation of both does not get reflected about.

Where the will and the intellect are taken for abstract human capacities, the question of a mediation does not arise for two reasons:

1. Praxis is deduced *a priori* from a theory, it follows the knowledge of truth. The concrete facts of individual psychology and the socio-political set up are in no way essential for the theory-praxis relationship: they are secondary or accidental and can as such be solved *a priori* by means of theory. The practical realization effected by the will, in principle, follows theoretical knowledge. However, on the basis of his freedom, which is not identical with his rationality, man can act against it and thus be bad.

2. From this it follows that a mediation of both in their relationship with each other remains completely out of sight, as their relationship has been undialectically determined in advance, and an analysis cannot establish anything further.

Of course, the mediation is sought in a reality that transcends the intellect-will relationship. It is the *anima*, the soul, to which the two potencies belong and which binds them together into a unity. The unity of theory and praxis is the human soul, and therefore, in principle an ontological datum, which exists independently of man's self-fulfilment or makes this possible in a theoretical as well as practical way.

In such a scheme of thought, with which theology operates to a large extent, theory is the criterion of praxis. The *vita contemplativa* has a priority over the *vita activa*.

The tendency which has been described in a simplified manner has extremely far-reaching consequences.



1. On the basis of this conception, there can be no mediation of theory and praxis, which would overcome their difference dialectically. Dualistically split as they are, the unity of both cannot be mediated in themselves; such an identity is conceivable, if at all, only "post-terrestrially", in God.

2. Theory is understood in its epistemological structure as an assimilation or adaptation. The function of knowledge is to make man receptively accommodative to the given world with its order. This assimilation takes place by means of an imitation, *mimesis*, of reality. Man is an imitator of God and the given world in his capacity to know. Theory is not used here in the sense of criticism. In principle, criticism can deal only with "subjective" error; it is to be avoided as far as natural or supernatural facts are concerned. Thus, unreflected mediation inhibits radical criticism and makes for uncritical theorization. The knowledge-governing interest here is evident: In an environmentally determined social condition that appears hopeless, man will seek relief in resignation and abstain from criticism. Of course, he is not relieved of the process of further thought, but indeed of the praxis orientation that demands change. The theoretical consciousness remains in this respect authority-bound, and accommodates itself without hesitation. It is not understood that knowledge is fundamentally criticism, and human knowledge is viewed, as far as its realization is concerned, in a pre-critical manner. As man's fundamental option in a particular social situation, this cuts off the praxis relationship radically. Thomas Aquinas's "optio fundamentalis" of man, his primary option, is here the renunciation of criticism and thereby of free, "adult" existence. This is the material determinant of the interest. It organizes the knowing process and offers itself as a particular fundamental option of human behaviour.

3. Because the dialectical orientation towards praxis is blocked off, the theoretical knowledge remains "pure theory". As the representative of the Greek cities at the public sacred games was called "theoros", i.e., the spectator, and as such fulfilled his task, only this kind of participation being expected of him, so the theoretician is enclosed in his own sphere, and the social function of science, i.e., what the theory means for human existence does not enter into his consideration. From this stand-



point there comes into being a scientific practice, which is not concerned with values, in spite of its logical deducible norms. Science has no essential relationship with praxis, in other words, it is as theory just an uncritically analytical criterion of praxis.

4. Because this theoretical self-understanding of human knowledge renounces criticism, it need not become practical. As concretization is warded off, an anticipatory vision of the whole is made possible. A meaning-horizon is opened up, and it discloses through its knowledge-governing interest (the "optio fundamentalis") the totality of "reality". This meaning-totality determines the priority of meaning over action by an anticipatory view of the future. The constitution of meaning is not understood as praxis but as universal synopsis anticipated in conformity with reality.

"Reality" is something "given". Religion is embedded in this context, and the anticipation of a meaning-totality is constitutive of it.

5. From this it follows that praxis is necessarily the subsequent realization of the "meaning-totality". As a result, it is meaning-consciousness that makes human action possible. Here, knowledge is separated from social theory, and its independence is acknowledged *a priori*.

If it is granted that knowledge-governing interests are at work here, and that the "optio fundamentalis" determines the very constitution of sense, it would mean that there is a certain desire to exempt something, may be God, as meaning-totality from discussion. We have here an interest which holds fast to a guarantee to make sure that the right action is performed, and which has thus to subordinate the praxis to theory. But wherever discussion and dialogue are suppressed in favour of an assurance, critical consciousness is atrophied, and dialectics cancelled. As a result, praxis naturally lags behind, and unity of theory and praxis is no longer mediated.

## II. The primacy of praxis

Pragmatism is a counter-move to this tendency that claims some validity even today. Here, praxis becomes the criterion of



theory, indeed, action needs no theoretical foundation. If the earlier view gave priority to theory, here praxis takes precedence.

Truth is conceived as something that can be carried into effect. It appears to be effected in human activity. What one can make, is true. What is true, becomes manifest in practical verification. It is not our concern here to describe American pragmatism (C. S. Peirce 1839-1914, W. James 1842-1912 and J. Dewey 1859-1954), which appears as the principal opponent of the Marxist picture theory of knowledge and which is declared Enemy No 1 by Marxist textbooks. What matters is rather a thought pattern that seems often to prevail over the Greek conception of theory in modern thought. Here, truth is seen as relation to the life interests of the subject, i. e., life interests provide the criterion of truth. The interest which can prevail over other interests, which holds good in living communication with them and which proves itself to be overpowering constitutes the truth. A certain relationship to Nietzschean doctrine should not be overlooked, because "the will to power" does not discover the truth but creates it. A certain doubt about man's capacity to know represses the reflection on theory and tries to develop from praxis a criteriology of theory. But the standard remains praxis, which sets up its norms in a "consequencism". The predictable consequences of an action constitute its significance and morality. Therefore, even theories are action plans without intrinsic significance. If truth is not identified simply with use it is indeed identical with its capability to prevail. It is the deed, and not the insight, that decides what is true. In the beginning was the deed, and not the word. The philosophy of the deed propagates itself through realization, but it is seen in terms of its effect. "The propaganda of the deed" is not seen in the doing itself (as in certain anarchist movements) but in the effect. The effectiveness and the accomplishment take the decision over the quality of life and its truth. The primacy accorded to theoretical vision as the coming into the possession of truth in the first position, i. e., analytical realism, becomes here accomplishment in its social recognition.

The useful result here is the mediation of theory and praxis. The product (not the production), commodity, in the broadest



sense, constitutes the meaningful relationship of praxis with theory. Thus, praxis constitutes a world (as the product of deed), and theory has to adapt itself to it or reflect it. Theory has to accomplish precisely what praxis is supposed to do according to our first position, namely, to adapt itself to theory, which on its part was adaptation to the cosmos. Praxis presents itself as assimilated to success, to the accomplished result. The mediation here is goods (produced as success) while according to the first position the good known in the world was in the main to accomplish this mediation.

Both views have this in common that in the first place theory and praxis are seen in their separatedness, and that separation or dissociation is considered to be fundamental. The split is something primary (gnoseologically and ontologically). Secondly the attempt at mediation is made, as it were, subsequently. Thirdly, the mediation takes place by means of an effect, whether it be pre-existent or produced. For all the essential differences between these viewpoints, there is thus a fundamental convergence to notice. Above all, it is something effected (whether pre-existent, e. g., as created by God, or produced) that enchants man and binds him authoritatively so that he is handed over to it and submits to it.

It may be objected to this somewhat simplified exposition of the two attempts to solve the theory-praxis problem that theory and praxis may not be identified with technique or *poesis*; it is this that produces an effect (*ergon*). (Cf. R. Bubner, "Renaissance der praktischen Philosophie", in *Philosophische Rundschau*, 22, 1975, 17 ff.). The Greek's insight into this difference was, however, submerged in many ways; besides, it does not invalidate the contention that praxis is conceived in both theories as an outcome, rather than a realization. The "outcome" or "result" is in both cases an adaptation to the good, which exists beforehand either in reality (primacy of praxis) or in knowledge (primacy of theory). It is this "good" that mediates between theory and praxis.

### III Attempts at a mediation: Plato, Kant, Hegel

Plato sees in the idea of the good the mediation of philosophy and politics, i. e., in relation to our problem, of contemplation and realization. The philosopher knows the truth in his theoretical knowledge and this theoretical realization alone sets



him in the truth of being; it is in theory that he is identical with himself. Now, there are shadowy existences that live in untruth (the story of the Cave); the philosopher has to become politically active in order to liberate them. It is in virtue of the idea of the good, which presents itself politically and thus practically as the common good of all, that he descends in this way to the Cave and achieves solidarity with the "prisoners" in order to liberate them (*Politeia*, 519 c-520 a; cf also 514 1 ff.). Because man does not live alone, he cannot live in knowledge alone but must become practical for the good of others. Theory and praxis are thus socially brought to a certain unity by means of the idea of the good.

This mediation through the good which appears as the 'idea' in Plato takes, in Kant, the form of duty.

Kant understands by theory the sum total of practical rules which are considered general principles and which are abstracted from the many conditions that necessarily influence their realization. Praxis presents itself as the following of such principles.

"It is evident... that there needs to be a middle term of connection and transition from theory to praxis" (I. Kant, *Über den Gemeinspruch: Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis*, Works, 9, Darmstadt 1975, 127). The question of theory's relationship with praxis is still prior to the problem of mediation. If there is a certain difference here, it is due to the fact that theory is not sufficiently grasped or given expression to. Too little theory prevents here the praxis. Nevertheless, the transition does not take place directly from ideality to praxis, but is mediated by the concept of duty. This is not directed at any particular goal, but indicates the point at which man's will acts "upon the *highest* good in the world" (ibid., 132). Thus, duty directs the individual as far as the universally good is concerned. Therefore a conflict between theory and praxis is impossible. They are united in duty. In Kant, this good can express itself concretely as a produced good (v.g., the administration of some one else's property). What has been theoretically recognized as right, realizes itself in the fulfilment of duty. Kant was the first in modern times to pose the problem of me-



mediation in this sharpness, which is already implicit in Plato's theory. The *agathon*, or good (in Plato, partly the divine), is the mediating power, which persists, historically seen, as a link between ancient and modern thought, though this appears in various forms. In Kant, duty is articulated as law in the state system and is defined accordingly. As the state law, conceived in terms of freedom, equality and independence, guarantees the unity to theory and praxis within the state system, so international law functions among different states. From here it is only a step to a mediation by the institution (State or Church) that would guarantee theory's relevance to praxis. The institution then appears as the rationalization of praxis by means of theory. Here, theory is still accorded a certain priority, though the praxis is very often shaped and determined by definite interests. But this mediation brings man thereby into danger of understanding himself as a particular case of the universal and as being forced to betray his identity for the sake of an illusory unity of theory and praxis.

Hegel may serve as a third instance as far as the theory-praxis mediation is concerned. Through his dialectics he became the starting-point for two important recent attempts in this area.

Here, the problems of Hegel interpretation cannot be entered into: how greatly the various interpretations differ among themselves, how one distinguishes between [the earlier and later Hegel or what influence a definite pre-understanding has on a particular Hegel interpretation (cf. M. Theunissen, "Die Verwirklichung der Vernunft: Zur Theorie-Praxis-Diskussion im Anschluss an Hegel", in *Philosophische Rundschau*, Beiheft 6). According to Hegel, the difference between theory and praxis is grasped by the idea. Hegel can thus criticize the given reality and that which is in a way accidental in it by confronting the restricted life with the idea. (This view is not far removed from Thomas Aquinas's theory of knowledge, because in Thomas Aquinas subject and object are mediated through the universal idea, which may be imagined in terms of the way a telescope functions; it is through the telescope alone that the stars become visible in their contours).

"The idea ... is this absolute unity of *being* and *reflection*



so that *being-in-itself-and-for-itself* exists only in as far as it is as much *reflection* and *position* and in as far as the *position* is the *in-itself-and-for-itself*" (*Wissenschaft der Logik*, II, Frankfurt, 1969, 247). The object has thus its objectivity through the reflection, which the idea mediates. So too truth appears neither outside of, nor before, the idea but only in its identity with the idea (cf. *ibid.*, 264). The determinateness of the idea is the good (cf. *ibid.* 542). For the good is mediation only when it has been realized. If it is not realized, it is the idea's relapse into indeterminateness, into the "bad infinite" (*ibid.* 547). The good as realized—it exists only in so far as it is realized, i.e., is the determination of the idea. This mediates theory and praxis. The external reality is posited as being in itself and for itself in that it is changed through the activity of the objective idea and its determination is thereby cancelled. The determination of the good is abolished as being a merely subjective and limited end and so is the necessity to realize it through subjective activity; indeed, it cancels the activity itself, and the mediation cancels itself too. One may find in this a tendency to reduce the subjective realization to the activity of the "objective spirit" or the "world spirit". There is a distortion of praxis in the face of dominating theory, but it would be going too far to suppose that this is opposed to change or socially revolutionary praxis. For the idea is in its determination of good social criticism; it reaches its end precisely in this way. Knowledge is produced and united with the practical idea in that the given reality is newly determined; the given reality is determined as the realized absolute end, but not as in intentional knowing as a merely objective world without the subjective idea but as an objective world whose inner ground and real existence is the idea... "This is the absolute idea... The absolute idea is the identity of the theoretical and the practical" (*ibid.*, 548).

In this mediation, the good is conceived together with the idea, and it is thus that the identity of reality is attained. Certainly, we may not say that Hegel delegates human action to the "world spirit" or the "absolute idea", and so gives up the dialectics of theory and praxis (for an opposite view cf. J. Habermas, *Theorie und Praxis*, Frankfurt, xx 3 1974, 148–171). However, the end and the rationality of the end are considered apart from man's self-realization. The subject is not required to set his goal apart from himself, in his action. The mediation has in fact



not succeeded or has succeeded only in a reduced form, because theory has in spite of it all a priority, above all, as regards the decisive point of meaning, (goal-) totality. The consequence is clear: The split in man, which causes suffering, is the non-identity between what is and what ought to be. If this tension is abolished through the knowledge that what is, is as it must be and thus also ought to be, the identity is reached by the mediation of the idea as determined by the good, and theory and praxis coincide. Of course, man doubts in many ways this mediation and does submit himself to it. Therefore, Hegel is of the opinion that because the insight into the necessity is often too weak to lead praxis into identity with theory, the idea is to be justified by means of force. Thus, the idea retains the meaning of a critical anticipation and would exercise a kind of domination.

Precisely in this system, it is once again clear what such an anticipation of a theory-oriented mediation means: the expropriation of the individual's freedom of self-realization.

On the other hand, if the pragmatic view is followed, - it does not need to be further developed here -, the commodity, success, or the "will to power" becomes the motive force of practical realization, and theory is mediated through this anticipation in the inauthentic manner just described, which does not bring man to his identity. The problem of mediation seems to have been solved by neither of these tendencies: the mediation of theory and praxis fails in this way of thinking. Marx and Kierkegaard developed new models of mediation in relation to this which were to be of significance sociologically as well as theologically for over a hundred years.

#### IV. The Marxist model

Man is not identical with himself, he is alienated from his own self. Marx sees reality in the form of man's distress and estrangement. "He thinks with the human misery at the centre, moving forward towards its abolition and backwards to the grounds of its origin" (H. U. V. Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit*, Einsiedeln, III/1, 223). The misery of self-alienated man is the point at which man becomes conscious of his situation and experiences



reality. The diastasis of theory and praxis, knowledge and action, is the condition of the possibility of change. It is through the knowledge of this difference that the question of a mediation becomes acute, and the question has for man the form of material misery. The abolition of this self-alienation is possible only through practical action. The "true reality" has to be brought into existence. The question of truth (like the question of life) cannot be solved in a purely theoretical manner. "The question whether objective truth is an attribute of human thought is not a theoretical but a practical question. Man must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the 'this-sidedness' of his thinking and practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from praxis is a purely *scholastic* question" (K. Marx, *Thesen über Feuerbach*, 2. These). *The happening history proves the truth of man's being.*

Through the discovery of man's self-alienation, its contradiction becomes evident, and so theoretical knowledge comes to be an element of revolutionary force, moving forward to the identity of man. "It is a psychological law that the theoretical spirit, once it becomes free in itself, becomes practical energy, as the will emerging out of the shadow kingdom of the Amenthes (= the Egyptian judge of the dead) turns against the worldly reality which had been there before him" (K. Marx, *Differenz der demokritischen und epikureischen Naturphilosophie* (Diss.), MEGA, I., 1, 1, 64).

The transition from theory to praxis and their mediation are thus conceived as *critique*. The mediation consists therefore in the yet-to-be-produced good, and this in the form of criticism. It abolishes the dichotomy of theory and praxis. Criticism is the midwife of the true reality in history. This mediation is, however, not the creation of the rational reality and the identity of man in such a way that it injects the truth into these, but this rational unity of theory and praxis is *in nuce* already there, indeed, it is so that not only "thought drives towards realization, reality must drive towards thought" (K. Marx, *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie*, MEGA, I., 1, 1, 616). Criticism is thus conditioned through both these movements. The present reality drives to its realization, and thought has to become practical. "Reason was always there, only not always in a reasonable form. The critic



can, therefore, start with any form of theoretical and practical consciousness and develop the true reality from the very forms of the existing reality as its obligation and ultimate goal" (K. Marx, "Brief an Ruge", Sept 1843, in *Frühschriften*, S. Landshut (ed.), Stuttgart, 1953, 169). Criticism raises praxis, what happens (unconsciously) to man or in history to consciousness, i.e., it mediates the praxis of theory. To put it more clearly: What matters is "that man lets the world become conscious of itself, wakes it up from its dreams, and *explains* to it its own actions" (ibid., 170 ff). Only then will the world come into possession of its self, and bring its cause to its identity. Reciprocally, theory criticism must grasp the "masses", become a "material force" and work practically. For as soon as the power of thought has struck root in the "ground of naive, popular" thinking, man will accomplish his emancipation, i. e., attain his stature. Marx perceives here a definite dialectical movement of theory and praxis by means of his understanding of criticism. The "weapon of criticism" is bound to the "criticism of weapons"; they are the material force that is changed through the power of the masses. Criticism in its mediating role is the only means that leads man to redemption from enslavement of all kinds and gives him his identity. The unity of theory and praxis is realized in criticism. As the good has for man a critical function as far as society is concerned, any other mediation, e. g. through religion, God etc., is excluded, because these mediations would only alienate man further as they are not realized "in man". So, "man is the greatest reality for men", because only his self-critical realization brings him to himself and mediates the unity. The "krisis" is thus the process of distinguishing the good from the evil, as John's Gospel hints. It can succeed only when nature has been radically humanized, and man has in this sense been naturalized, i. e., when he attains to himself. But as long as the power of alienation is not broken, the "means of living" has power over the life of man, the thing as means prevails over the end, the criticism does not yet bring the process to its end, the wound of non-identity is not healed. Matter will become the genuine foundation of human life, and no longer dominate it, only when the economic element of necessities becomes the basis of the reign of freedom in society. "On the other side of it (= the reign of necessity) begins the development of human power, which presents itself as



an end in itself, the true reign of freedom which, however, can blossom only on the ground of that reign of necessity as its basis" (K. Marx, *Das Kapital*, III, Berlin, 1949, 873 ff.).

In all his investigations, the interest that guides Marx is the question why the social condition of man today is what it is. The critical thought discovers the dialectics of this human process and can thus interpret the knowing subject in the context of social praxis and describe the mediation. Criticism proves its truth that if the mediation has succeeded, it confirms itself in the process of its coming into consciousness in praxis.

To be sure, we need to distinguish between the early and later Marx, as the later Marx is influenced by Engels. One finds in some of his works the above described criticism as a full dialectical movement, in which the mediation of theory and praxis succeeds; but as soon as the dialectics are not strictly retained and causal connections are construed between the basis and the superstructure, they are resolved or are exempted from criticism. If this happens, the world process obtains a certain independence from man and subordinates him. Dialectics becomes then the law of the world, and the materialistic view is exempted from its critical moment. It comes to be an irrefutable truth, and the mediation of theory and praxis breaks down, for it is then considered as something absolute, i. e., separated from praxis, and becomes an ideology.

Therefore, if dialectics are, as it were, to detach themselves from a critical framework, man will be subordinated to them and will be enslaved again.

This is made possible by the fact that the criticism itself is not further reflected upon by Marx. On the contrary, it becomes an instrument of an independent dialectical movement. Here, Marx overlooks the fact that criticism makes up this movement in that it enters into the historically variable experience context to legitimize itself as criticism and so to be reflectable as such (cf. J. Habermas, *Theorie und Praxis*, 264 ff.). As religion becomes an ideology when it misuses its power as magic, so does criticism, if it allows itself to be enticed by an objective dialectics. Only if criticism remains in the dialogical situation and as mediation



guards strictly the relation of theory and praxis, it does not deteriorate into an ideology in which history becomes *the* subject. But the sense of history is revealed only when men practically engage themselves in realizing history with consciousness and will. The unity of theory and praxis is historical and realizes itself only as "krisis" in history, and every consideration, which construes a totality theoretically as an *a priori* plan, is an ideology that frees itself from criticism. It is precisely for that reason that it destroys man in his historical realizations. The unity of theory and praxis cannot succeed in this way.

An eloquent example is the development of Marxism. Here, criticism in the form of responsible dialogue is distrusted, and "krisis" is particularized. Its place is taken by an organizational, power which understands itself as the coming into consciousness of the dialectical movement of history and takes over the mediation of theory and praxis. This momentous shift of accent concerning mediation begins with Lenin. Now, to realize itself, this mediation requires organized efforts. The Communist party takes over the unitive function, and the unity of theory and praxis is not realized intrinsically but is artificially produced. "The incorporation of the ideas of socialism in the workers' movement is realized through the revolutionary activity of the proletariat" (quoted according to G. Wetter, *Der dialektische Materialismus*, Vienna, 1958, 305). As it is the only mediation between the idea and its realization, the toleration of other views would destroy precisely the principle of the unity of theory and praxis, and it would have to be abandoned. The consequences of such a view of unity are well-known.

Nevertheless, the interrelatedness of theory and praxis as found in Marx is retained, although the mediatory function is institutionalized.

In this co-ordination, Marxism includes praxis in the knowledge theory, where praxis is seen as the criterion of the reliability of knowledge (cf. *Grundlagen des Marxismus-Leninismus*, Berlin, 1963, 104). "Theory is not conceived by Marxism as something principally different from praxis but as the grasping and generalisation in thought of the practical experience of men" (ibid).



Man's consciousness mirrors and pictures the world, at the same time as it makes it as well. "A theory dissociated from praxis becomes a dead blossoming, a praxis whose way theory does not enlighten must grope in darkness" (ibid., 106). Theory is understood here as the generalization of practical experience. Praxis is a process in which man works upon reality (cf. ibid., 125 ff.). Praxis is the world-changing activity of men, however, not of individuals but of bigger social groups like the class or the party. Praxis is thus the criterion of truth, not any praxis, however, but only the revolutionary praxis which the party guarantees as the organ of the working class. Within this there is then room for criticism and self-criticism. It becomes clear again that though praxis is accorded a certain priority over theory, it remains bound to the party's mediation: from here comes an immutable dogmatism that accepts situationless absolute truths, independent of any praxis and similarly also the revisionism which goes behind the truths by questioning them and thus calls Marxism itself into question. The knowledge-governing interest in this defence is evident: it is the binding of truth to a mediation in the form of the party. Here, the truth is absolute in the framework of the development process. This flows into a reign of freedom, which is the communist society (cf. ibid., 132).

Mao Tse-Tung too develops his interpretation of the theory-praxis relationship according to this thought pattern. Obviously, he presupposes the party as the mediation, but speaks in this connection usually in a more general way of the movement of the masses and the class. The classes of the exploited workers, of the proletariat, existed "in themselves long before the communist movement, but it is through the *organised* campaign that the proletariat became a class "for itself" (Mao Tse-Tung, *Collected Works*, I, Peking, 1963, 354). But even in the class become conscious of itself there are tendencies that destroy its unity. Therefore, what matters is "the concrete historical unity of the subjective and objective, of theory and praxis, of knowledge and action as well as the fighting of all false views, whether rightist or leftist, which are dissociated from concrete history" (ibid., 362). The concrete social praxis is the criterion of the truth content of our knowledge. This praxis has, therefore, priority over theory, because it is not only universal like the theory but in addition to this is also immediately real. It is the foundation



of theory, and is always oriented towards, and sustained by, it. Man turns to new praxis which in its turn is the verification or falsification of theory. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. Man comes to know the theory and methods of revolutionary movements through participation. Objective realities are experienced through social practice. The individual must enrol in the revolutionary social movement in order to attain to the truth and to find the unity of theory and praxis. Therefore, social praxis mediates to the individual the truth which is gained through this experience. Marxism is not a deposit of truth, in this respect. Truth is indeed never exhausted, but it opens up in praxis new ways to the knowing of truth uninterruptedly (cf. *ibid.*, 362). Dialectical materialism in the practice of the party is the way to reach all truth and is as such the universally valid truth. In the process of development, the particular stages of truth are indeed relative. As the sum total of relative truths, however, there follows the absolute truth. The unity of reality is preserved by means of the socially organized revolutionary movement. "Praxis, knowledge, again praxis and knowledge - this cyclic form repeats itself endlessly, and the content of praxis and knowledge is raised in each particular cycle to a higher level. That is the whole knowledge theory of dialectical materialism, that is the dialectical-materialistic theory of the unity of knowledge and action" (*ibid.*, 363).

Here again, notwithstanding the greater dynamism of the concept of the party, mediation is not criticism as in Marx but the social praxis in the institutionalized manner of the party. It is conceived from praxis, but does not lead the concrete human being to his freedom in that the unity of theory and praxis is constituted not through man's self-realization but through his participation in the power of the party, which in its turn brings him to self-realization. The significance of praxis induces man to cover up the dialogical situation of man's social reality and to bind himself to a given praxis, which is obviously dialectically variable but appears in fact in the shape of an immutable institution though this is newly structured from time to time. As the churches have understood themselves as mediators of salvation, so the party understands itself now as the mediator of man's self-realization. But it is this absoluteness



precisely that destroys the unity and brings man under a "new master".

We see how variously the "passage from one domination to another" can occur.

## V. The "decisionistic" attempt

In opposition to Hegel and the "Leftist" development of Hegelianism in Marxism, Kierkegaard, the Existentialist philosophies and dialectical theology have tried to develop a different model of mediation.

What is the meaning of human existence? This question, which concerns man's identity with himself, cannot be solved in an abstract and general way. What is in question here is not the total context out of which being is explained but my concrete existence. The problem is not what human existence really is but how the concrete human being finds his identity. This is not possible abstractly, i.e., by means of general theory. A general concept can, therefore, have no mediatory function. It does not affect concrete existence or its practical realization. In fact, the very concept of existence, as something universally valid, cannot accomplish such a mediation. Such an abstract, theoretical anticipation would degrade the realization of existence, and through that reduce it to a mere imitation or reproduction of existence. In the realm of existence, the application of a concept determines its truth and validity. If somebody sees a sign-board "Bar" in a second-hand shop, he would be ill-advised to want to quench his thirst there; he would be laughed at. What was offered for sale was indeed only the sign-board "Bar". It depends on the practical realization, which use it has in that situation. So even a madman may repeat constantly a right proposition: "The earth is round". The realization and the use determine whether it is to be considered rational or nonsensical. Similarly praxis determines in reality the theory. The unity is effected in the practical application. This applies any way where truth is not seen as a result but as realization, as the way man attains to his self. As regards the inventions of natural sciences, truth may be identical with theory; but where truth is not knowledge but being, which is a way, it proves itself only in praxis. Theory alone is insufficient. "For the existing spirit as



(quo) existing spirit the question of truth remains; for an abstract answer is only for something abstract; indeed, man becomes this by abstracting from himself as (quo) existent, but he can do so only momentarily, and in even such moments he remains indebted to his being in that he exists all the same" (S. Kierkegaard, *Unwissenschaftliche Manuskript*, I. Teil, Düsseldorf, 1951, 198 ff.). K. Jaspers adopts a similar view of theory-praxis co-ordination: "The truth out of which I live is only by my becoming identical with it. Truth, whose rightness I can prove, exists without me" (*Der philosophische Glaube*, Zurich, 1948, 11). Truth and sense are not to be theoretically elucidated, they reveal themselves in practical realization. But this means that the truth of a theory, in as much as concerns man's life, is not *a-prioristic* but historical.

Only a thought which realizes itself not only in abstract concepts but in existence, i.e., unfolds existence by "thinking" it, it is in truth, which is a way, a process. The unity of theory and praxis is real only where human existence is realized in thought. This way of existence is for Kierkegaard ethical and religious. Thus, in this unity, there is no question of the mediation of an abstract concept (Hegel).

The mediatory role of an institution, whether it be the party, State or Church, is also excluded. For the Church is concerned with the existing states of affairs. "The existing state of affairs is itself an entirely unchristian concept" (Papirer, <sup>1</sup> X, A 407). Man joins it without genuine decision, and it inhibits the process of his becoming himself. The Church's mediation prevents thereby the identity of man and holds theory and praxis apart by placing itself in between. The individual is subordinated in his development and existential self-realization in this institution, and he loses himself thus by having recourse to the relieving function of the Church (cf. my treatment of the problem in *Christentum ohne Kirche*, Aschaffenburg, 1973). Here Christianity is offered at a reduced rate. The Church offers thus an inauthentic identity, a false unity of theory and praxis.

The party, or the State itself, functions in the same way if it supports itself on mass movements. Human existence is then quantified and only in that way it counts. The responsibility of



the individual is weakened, as he is nothing more than a fraction of the crowd. So the mass reaction is claimed to be the truth, whereas it is the greatest untruth. The mass acts without responsibility, because in a murder, for example, there is ultimately no one who has committed it. Thus the quantitative determination of man prevents his qualitative determination. It is in the mass, and not in the community, that the individual is estranged from his goal and comes to exist inauthentically. He is then bereft of his self. He has not to achieve the unity of theory and praxis in himself; the mass or its organization does it for him.

The concrete man is thus betrayed by three mediations, which give the appearance of a unity of theory and praxis: by philosophy, by the Church and by the State.

What matters is that man finds his self, becomes himself. It is a question of the realization of existential becoming. "This is a historical process, which can become meaningful only by being realized. The process is never concluded; man is never finished but exists as self-realization. Man himself is the desired synthesis of theory and praxis. This is obstructed by the three mediations mentioned above. The true mediation must consist in the very process of the union of the two. Man is alienated from himself by being determined by others. The process of self-realization can thus be kept going only by self determination. Human existence is realized in the realization of the freedom of man.

Self-determination takes place through free decision. The self, man as a synthesis, is realized in the decision, and that means that the decision - its realization - sets man in his identity: it is the mediation of theory and praxis. The only presupposition is that man does not come into the world ready-made but has to verify himself, his self, in time and history so that it is only then that he becomes what he really is. Likewise, the unity of theory and praxis is not something which one can hold out as a thing at hand, but a process of becoming. This becoming is realized through the concrete man in his existential fulfilment, and this is mediated through self-determination, i.e., through free decision. Here meet, as it were, time and eternity, here is



the privileged moment of man, where he breaks through the dispersion in his drift through linear time extension (cf. S. Kierkegaard, *Der Begriff Angst*, Hamburg 1960, 88 ff.). The moment of decision mediates to the lived existence, man, the unity of theory and praxis, reconciliation, and redemption from self-estrangement.

Theologically, this decision is "fulness of time". Almost hundred years later, this tendency was further developed philosophically and theologically by dialectical theology, and here occur similar shifts as in the case of Marx's thought. What Marx called criticism was mitigated within the party ranks; what Kierkegaard declared as decision became a decision binding itself to the kerygma (and later to the historical Jesus). Both were, of course, not quite innocent as regards this modification.

In Bultmann's understanding, decision is bound to preaching, which as address demands a new decision on the part of man. Even here the presupposition is that man is alienated from himself, i.e., he is a sinner. He obtains his salvation not in a theory above God's grace or so but only by his participation in the salvation event. This happens when he accepts the proclamation of faith and decides for it. What matters is the decision: for the proclaimed Christ or against him. In this decision, man either gains or loses himself definitively. Here, the question is not that man "chooses this or that out of an amazing variety of future possibilities according to the standards he has brought with himself from his past; on the contrary, these very standards are called into question, and man chooses in reality not something for himself but he decides with every choice basically his own very possibility" (R. Bultmann, *Jesus*, Tübingen, 1958, 77; cf. also my explanations in *Der Glaubensvollzug*, Essen, 1963, 156 ff.). Through this decision to accept the salvific message in faith man will thus become a sinner or just. It is God's word in the proclamation that makes the new determination of one's self possible. This offers men historically the new possibility to constitute their whole self-awareness anew in self-realization. "In this he decides in belief or unbelief, he chooses his authentic being or decides for his irreal being" (R. Bultmann, *Théologie des Neuen Testaments*, Tübingen, 1968, 376). Through the gift of the kerygma, it is possible for man to realise himself anew to



become new in his belief-decision. Man experiences this gift only in history, i.e., when he takes part in the process of history.

Man finds his identity not simply in the historical decisions of his life, but the privileged moment is the proclamation. Through it, it is possible to become really new, i.e., to believe the word of God and let oneself be determined by it. The free decision is, therefore, not the last thing that can be set up as the mediation between thought and self-realization. It is possible only within the proclamation event. The transition from theory (from which man seeks to know himself on his own) to praxis (in which he is not only perfected as man but becomes a new man) is understood as the proclamation of the word in Jesus Christ (the salvation event), through which man makes his belief decision. The mediation between theory and praxis is conceived here as a rational realization. The identity is gifted to man in his belief decision. It is thus determined by something other than the subject, even if it is interpreted as one's own perfection. The mediation is thus in the true sense of the word a salvation event or salvific act of God in the kerygma. Through this man attains to himself. Theory and praxis find their identity in the adoption of and decision for this kerygma. Man *is* in truth what he realizes.

It needs to be asked how far a decision in the above sense for the kerygma does not bind man again to something given. That it is understood as an event does not make any difference, since man to conform to it through his belief (decision), is subordinated to it. Man's identity is thereby submitted to the proclamation (or to Jesus Christ) in a way that inhibits the sought-for self-realization. We find here a considerably great similarity to the function of the party, for the kerygma has indeed been interpreted ecclesiastically, institutionally or historically (the historical Jesus). Even in case it is not institutionally bound (as, for instance, with Bultmann), man remains in reality authority-bound, as the kerygma is ultimately unquestionable.

Further, the decision is affected in this way of thinking (also in a way in Kierkegaard) by a certain irrationalism. Indeed, this is denied by saying that God's word is a guarantee for its intelligibility, but the problem is only postponed in this



way. The kerygma can no longer be rationally interrogated, and belief decision has its foundation only in this. So this position comes close to a decisionistic faith, but with that the mediation is outside discourse and of the dialectics of theory and praxis. The mediation is something transcendent, and is not revisible, as it exempts itself from criticism in this way.

Such decisionistic tendencies are found today in positivistic philosophical currents. According to Popper, reason cannot be rationally accounted for. An enlightened and rational thought can justify itself only as belief. My attitude, how I answer the question of unity, depends on an act of decision. This is the act of faith. "For all knowledge that is practically realised, the last answer is the decision of belief." The problem consists "not in choosing between knowledge and belief but in choosing between two kinds of belief" (K. Popper, *Die offene Gesellschaft*, II, Bern, 1958, 324). Whether one believes in a religious sense or trusts natural science, a decision is always involved. As reason presupposes decision, thought cannot as such be something responsible and the decision is rationally mediated. Both "realms" are basically separate and the co-ordination can no longer succeed. The constructivist attempts at norm formation (Lorenzen, Kambartel, Lorenz, Kamlah and others) of the Erlangen school and the communication theories (Apel, Habermas) take up positions against these conventionalist currents. Some of these can contribute decisively to new solutions (cf. R. Bubner, art. cit., 25 ff). J. P. Sartre has undertaken an attempt to reconcile rationally the critical-dialectic viewpoint with the decisionistic (cf. my treatment of the problem in *Gott ohne Gott*, Graz, 1972).

Summing up, we may say that the attempts at a solution of the theory-praxis problem does not stick to dialectics in such a way as to achieve a genuine synthesis of both. But in the different tendencies there are elements that cannot be given up:

1. The "scholastic" emphasis on theory and the pragmatic emphasis on praxis pose the problem, but dissolve the relationship undialectically. A genuine mediation does not take place.

2. There are attempts at a mediation (also of a dialectical



kind in Hegel) in great philosophers as well as theologians. The question of the good plays a decisive role in these attempts.

3. It is in the post-Hegelian interpretations that the mediation between theory and praxis is dialectically seen for the first time. Two concepts are central: criticism and decision. Both are not, as we have seen, sufficiently reflected upon. Here a genuinely new beginning has been made.

## VI. Conceptual clarification and an attempt at a solution

Before drawing conclusions, it is necessary to clarify the concepts further. It is evident that there are different concepts of theory and praxis. Theory may mean the consideration of beings (entities) in their being as well as the contemplation of the divine Being; or it may be understood as the knowledge of nature as the eternal, immutable cosmos. In relation to the subject, it may mean the contemplation of the divine in man or the self-contemplation of man, of human subjectivity. In its gnoseological content, theory may be an affirmation differing in abstractness and generality as well as a conventional determination. Or "theories are syntactic-semantic systems with pragmatic relevance" (*Handbuch philosophischer Grundbegriffe*, 5, 1491). It is common to all conceptions of theory that they mean some knowledge which, systematically ordered, claims a certain universality. This implies an element of valuation and refers to a praxis-relationship, however vague it may be. Theory is always affected by abstraction.

*Praxis* may mean very generally collected experience. We say that some one has "praxis"; we speak of different practices, say of a parish priest or of a court. Praxis is often distinguished from making (*poesis*): in this case technical and instrumental actions do not come under praxis. Praxis is in this sense a lived interaction, it is political action, or generally, a historically situated action including thought and speech. In all its variability in content, praxis can also be conceived in connection with a new orientation through which duty claims are made (cf. H. Fahrenbach, in *Rehabilitierung der praktischen Philosophie* I, edited by M. Riedel Freiburg, 1972, 40 ff; elaborate definition).

Praxis is here commonly understood as realization, which



exerts its influence on the world around us and obtains thus a certain universal validity, which does not for that reason make it abstract. In view of its generality praxis is related to theory.

The co-ordination of theory and praxis can be understood as an analytical procedure, as is the case with the first two models, or *dialectically*. In such a relationship with one another, there is an interdependence in which the one is served by the other, and vice versa. It is not as if the theory develops first and then the praxis changes as a result or the other way about, but the change affects both in strict dependence on each other. The one calls the other in question and also itself. Neither of the two can rest when the other is in discussion. The movement is dialectical. Adorno describes this rightly as a certain discontinuity: "No straight path leads from praxis to theory. . . Theory, however, belongs to the social context and is autonomous at once. Nevertheless, praxis does not occur independently of theory, and the latter not independently of the former. If praxis were the criterion of theory, it would have been in deference to the *thema probandum* the fraud attacked by Marx, and would not be able to attain to what it wants; if praxis were to guide itself simply in accordance with theory, it could harden in a doctrinaire manner and would falsify the theory too" (Th. W. Adorno, *Stichworte: Kritische Modelle* 2. Frankfurt, 1969, 189 ff., "Marginalien zu Theorie und Praxis"). Theory and praxis are not, therefore, to be understood in terms of a gradual transition; that would be undialectical; they are to be understood rather in the form of a qualitative *change* that can occur in one and the same realization. It is the dialectical understanding of theory and praxis that makes possible the positing of the problem of mediation in a radical way, and if 'radical' means 'from the root' and points to man, the concrete human being - and only he - is the place of this mediation. So on the basis of what we have said up to now, we may describe the mediation as the critical and maximally free decision which is responsibly communicative. The unity of theory and praxis is thus critically realized. It is always criticism of the existing situation and thus the beginning of the overcoming of all distress. So criticism presents itself to be the good that brings the alienated man to himself. Man enters into the *krisis*. It shall not, however, pretend to be something absolute; on the contrary, a



criticism of the criticism is always required; it is to be questioned in the same way as all theories and practices are.

But criticism should not be directed in an alienating way or prescribed to man as a remedy; it is not an instrument of alien domination only when the concrete existence realizes it. The subjectivity which is man should be responsible for his decision spontaneously in free self-possession. This free decision should not be subordinated to a given norm, whether this be a social order, the kerygma, or a revealing God, which would enslave man and rob him of his self-possession again. The same applies to the promise of a kingdom, freedom or God, envisaged or hoped for as an end. The critical decision can only be an act of self-realization in that the praxis in itself is cognitive and realizes the reality, and man attains himself in liberating criticism.

Here, decision must be rationally responsible and cannot find its meaning in a pre-rational faith. Understood in this sense, belief prevents the self-realization of man and the unity of reality. Such a free, critical self-realization liberates; it has an emancipatory character. This self-realization in self-criticism is as responsible unity communicative. This is not because it degenerates into a determining force outside in the form of the kerygma but because the decision occurs at once also for fellow-men. That means, it must be justified dialogically. The dialogical structure of the co-ordination of theory and praxis is not a force set up above man considered as an end in itself nor is it a destiny given in advance by the history of being, but the a-personal expression of man's dialogical mode of existence. Thus decision has at once a social rationality without being submitted to a social order. It is here that the "rationality of unforced dialogue of men communicating with one another" (Habermas) is in operation. The spontaneity of the concrete is here socially tied up and inter-subjectively "regulated", without domination being exercised over those below. Otherwise, man would remain bound to a dialectic in which he is not yet free for a dialogue of adult men. The masses kept in tutelage, as if they were not come of age, whether by the party, the Church or other institutions, prevent the dialogue of free subjectivity.

Thus, the three elements of one and the same realization



seem essential for the mediation of theory and praxis to succeed: (i) critical criticism, (ii) free self-realization, (iii) dialogical responsibility.

The anguish of an inauthentic existence may be removed in this process. In the Christian tradition, Jesus Christ is a model who realized this fulfilment. Christology must be an explication of this unity, and this can be meaningfully developed only as soteriology. It became evident in Jesus' reaction against the law and the prescribed norms that there is something that is rational in itself and significant for man (cf. my explanations in *Charisma als Ordnungsprinzip der Kirche*, Freiburg, 1969, 1. Abschnitt). The unity of word and deed in the biblical understanding is specifically, though not exclusively, Christian. Jesus accomplished something (miracles, speeches etc.) that in itself was understood as liberating and that appeared to be significant for others. Christology can here function as a model for anthropology. This hint should refer us back to the realization of the unity of theory and praxis, a unity which is possible and which has been realized.

The "unity of theory and praxis belongs to those concepts which can be obtained by the negation (=criticism) of the existing situation. It says no more than that men can know what they do when they do something, while in the context of an alienated praxis and an ideological consciousness, they do not really know what they do, and even if they do know, they cannot orient themselves accordingly in action. The unity of theory and praxis signifies the truth which is to be made and is at the same time the supreme measure of reason, in so far as all striving towards the making of the truth in an alienated context should be called rational. Reason is the access to the future of truth" (J. Habermas, *Theorie und Praxis*, 438).

Thus dialogics can succeed in the dialectical process of theory and praxis. The liberating unity can be worked out in self-realization and the alienation be critically abolished, provided this realization is accomplished, and theory is not torn apart from praxis. Priorities do not make the unity impossible, and so every genuine mediation is not thwarted by some particular knowledge-governing interest.



In this mediation (manifest in the model Jesus Christ), man can fulfil himself, live in critical freedom and exist in dialogue and communication. The talk of a kingdom of the good (the kingdom of God), of a kingdom of freedom can be meaningful here.

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## The Dialectics of Belief and Life – the Need for a New Orientation in Theology

Christian theologians take pride in affirming the scientific nature of their inquiry.<sup>1</sup> In the medieval university, theology<sup>2</sup> was the “scientia scientiarum”, the science *par excellence*. Though this is no longer the belief today, the tendency to claim for theology a certain superiority over the other disciplines is not extinct.

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1. K. Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatic*, I-1, 9; K. Rahner, “Theologie”, in *Herders Theologisches Taschenlexikon* (8 vols, Freiburg, 1972-73, abbreviated to HThT), VII, 236-247; G. Ebeling, “Theologie I: Begriffsgeschichtlich” in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (6 vols, Tübingen, 1957-62, abbreviated to RGG), VI, 754-768; H. H. Schrey, “Theologie II: Evangelische Theologie”, *ibid.*, 770-775; J. Ratzinger, “Theologie III: Katholische Theologie”, *ibid.*, 775-778; J. B. Metz, “Theologie”, in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (10 vols, Freiburg, 1957-67, abbreviated to LThK), X, 62-71.

2. In the following pages, the word “theology” is used to mean Christian theology. This is not because Christian theology is “the theology” (P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, I, Welwyn Herts, 1968, 19) or because theology is something unique to Christianity (cf. G. Ebeling, *art. cit.*, 759-761). Ebeling’s view



Karl Rahner accords theology a kind of supervisory function.<sup>3</sup> As "the advocate of the incomprehensible mystery", theology is there to remind the sciences of their need for self-criticism. This article is, in the first place, an attempt to investigate the truth value of theology's claim to be a scientific study of Christian reality.<sup>4</sup> Contrary to its professed intents, it would seem that theology is not sufficiently scientific, critical or practical.<sup>5</sup> As a result of an abstract and undialectical procedure and on account of a basic strain of irrationalism, theological theories are less true and relevant than theologians claim. There are three main drawbacks.

1. Theology, especially systematic theology, does not attend sufficiently to the praxis dimension of Christianity, and when it does, it does not consider Christian praxis in its dialectical relationship with Christian theory.

2. Because of selective procedure and reinterpretation, which can be called selective appropriation and retrojective interpretation respectively, theology fails to do justice to the whole of Christian theory, not to speak of Christian praxis.

3. Even the more open and critical directions in theology have a tendency to exempt a certain core of belief from the process of theory-praxis dialectics and to immunize it against critical examination.

In the second place, this article will inquire whether theology's claim to be a truly scientific, critical and practical discipline can be realized at all, and if it can be, in what way it is.

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that other religions have only esoteric, syncretic or apologetic speculations, and no real theology seems to derive from a Christianity-centred bias rather than from an objective study of facts.

3. K. Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie* up to now 12 vols, Einsiedeln, 1954 ff, abbreviated to SchTh), X, 98-99.

4. It is not claimed that theology is generally defined as the "science of Christianity". It is meant that theology's self-understanding implies the claim to be a scientific study of Christian faith and Christianity. - Cf. W. Pannenberg, *Wissenschaftstheorie und Theologie*, rankfurt a. M., 1973 (abbreviated to WTh), 253-266, 317.

5. The words "science" and "scientific" are used in a broader sense and would cover all rational, systematic bodies of knowledge allowing some kind of verification or refutation.



It must be said, at the outset, that the intent of this article is more to pose a problem and to suggest the direction in which a solution may be sought than to offer a set of definitive conclusions. These have rather the character of hypotheses requiring further research and verification. It is impossible to consider the *whole* of theology or even its principal directions within the compass of a modest essay. We cannot consider here anything more than a fraction of contemporary theological thought. In fact, the discussion will be restricted to four theologians from the German-speaking world – Karl Rahner and Hans Küng from the Catholic tradition, and Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg from the Protestant tradition – and to what they have to say of the essential or original meaning of Christianity and Christian belief. All of them are known to be open-minded and forward-looking, and their influence goes beyond the limits of their countries and confessions. True, their thought is not representative of the whole range of contemporary theology, but it is admitted by many that their theologies represent the more refreshing, original and promising directions in contemporary theological research.

The theme will be developed in six stages:

I. First there is the practical dimension of theology and Christianity and the need to consider this in its relationship with Christian belief and doctrine, especially in view of our increasing awareness of theory-praxis dialectics.

II. Next the understanding of Christianity in the writings of Rahner, Küng, Moltmann and Pannenberg will be briefly considered.

III. The theories of Christianity discussed in section II will be confronted and contrasted with the reality of Christian praxis, especially in those aspects of it that seem to contradict these theories. It can be shown that the less comfortable aspects of Christian practice have their roots, at least partly, in Christian theory including the biblical traditions.

IV. The predominantly positive and inviting image of Christianity will be shown to be the result of a tactical, apologetic or applicationalist retreat to an “essential” or “original” Christianity by means of a selective appropriation and retroje-



tive interpretation of what appears to be true and valid in the Christian, especially, the biblical traditions.

V. Can theology avoid being an abstract, arbitrarily one-sided and idealized theory of Christianity, liable to ideological misuse? This will be shown to be possible only if theology is understood and practised as an unprejudiced, critical and scientific inquiry into the meaning, truth and relevance of Christianity, attending to the whole of Christian belief and life in terms of the dialectics of theory and praxis.

VI. The article will conclude by offering tentative suggestions as regards the practice of theology in terms of the new understanding outlined in section V.

Thus, the "negative" accent of our *critique* is meant to form part of a positive process, as it seeks to uncover a negative situation.

## I. The Problem of Belief and Practice

### 1. The praxis dimension of belief

It is generally admitted that Christianity is neither theory without praxis nor praxis without theory. Christian belief is something that needs to be realized in the life and activity of man. However, the relationship of the one to the other is not immediately clear, and there can be considerable differences in determining its nature. On the one hand, there have been instances of a certain emphasis on theory or knowledge as opposed to praxis or action. The monks withdraw from the world and worldly activity in pursuit of the superior ideal of contemplation. For Thomism, the most influential philosophy among Catholics till recent years, the ultimate goal of human life was the beatific vision which is essentially an act of the speculative intellect. It cannot be claimed that this has absolutely no basis in the Bible. Jesus promised the pure of heart the vision of God (Mt 5:6), and Paul said that "we now see only puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we shall see face to face" and that the partial knowledge of the present will then be whole, like God's knowledge of us (I Cor 13:12; cf also Jn 20:8; 12:38-41; 6:44; 14:9). The expectation of the imminent parousia seems to have led to a certain passivity and abstention from work (1 Thes 3:11; Lk



19:11) and thus implied the danger of a "theoretical" Christianity.<sup>6</sup> Be that as it may, the Bible abounds in passages that indicate an essentially praxis-related understanding of belief.<sup>7</sup> Sacrifices are useless and "abhorrent" unless the people cease to do evil and learn to do right, pursue justice and champion the oppressed (cfr Is 13:17; Hos 6:6; Amos 5:27 ff). The reign of God that Jesus announced demanded a radical conversion of heart, *metanoia*,<sup>8</sup> and not merely a theoretical acceptance of his words: 'The time has come; the kingdom of God is upon you; repent and believe the Gospel' (Mk 1:15 and par.). The believer is called upon to love others, to love even his enemy and to show this in practice (Mt 5:38; Lk 10:25-37); in this process the disciple may have to part with his family and his belongings, and suffer persecution and death (Mt 10:37-39). "Not every one who calls me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but only those who do the will of my heavenly Father" (Mt 7:21; cf. Lk 6:46). Going beyond this, John hints at the praxis-influenced nature of belief: "Here lies the test: the light has come into the world, but men preferred darkness to light because their deeds were evil. Bad men all hate the light and avoid it, for fear their practices will be shown up" (Jn 3:19-20). Though we may not share the unqualified allegation that all those who rejected Jesus did so because of their evil life, the passage is significant in that it indicates a certain awareness of the theory-praxis dialectics. This is true of Paul's reference to the pagans' moral depravity and blindness as due to their wickedness and the consequent stifling of the truth (Rom 1:18-32). Again, John sees praxis as the criterion of true discipleship: "If there is love among you, then all will know that you are my disciples" (Jn 13:35). Thus, it would be wrong to consider Christianity or Christian belief merely or chiefly as a matter of theory or contemplation. And theology needs to consider Christianity in terms of both its theory and praxis, without ignoring or discarding those elements of its traditions that do not quite fit in with its understanding as "orthopraxis" as well as "orthodoxy."

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6. Cf. J. Beutler, "Das Theorie-Praxis-Problem in neutestamentlicher Sicht", in L. Bertsch (ed.), *Theologie zwischen Theorie und Praxis*, Frankfurt a. M., 1975, 151-157.

7. Cf. *ibid.*, 157-176.

8. J. Blanc, *Jesus von Nazareth, Geschichte und Relevanz*, Freiburg, 1973, 107-111.



## 2. Theology and the dialectics of theory and praxis

As a matter of fact, theology has seldom completely lost sight of the praxis dimension of Christianity. Thomas Aquinas's conception of theology as a speculative science could establish itself only through a struggle against those for whom theology was above all *theologia practica* in the tradition of *sapientia* (wisdom) (Wth 228 ff). The concept of theology as a practical science continued to be alive till modern times and can be found in early Protestantism. For Luther theology was obviously practical and not speculative (ibid). Contemporary theologians, Catholic as well as Protestant, would have little difficulty in accepting Luther's emphasis on the practical nature of their inquiry, though all may not equally share his devaluation of its theoretical aspect. "That the fundamental questions of theology are treated not only in a theoretical way rests on the nature of Christian faith, which is essentially concerned with the practical realisation of the mystery of salvation meant for all men."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, "Christian theology is itself a historical initiative. It does not verify what was and is, but tries to change things historically through political language.... in the modern terminology: it is the theory of a historical praxis and not yet the theory of the vision of God."<sup>10</sup> Again, "Christian theology is a theology of the cross.... In its following the crucified Jesus, Christian existence is a praxis that transforms man himself and the circumstances [in which he lives]. To that extent the theology of the cross is a practical theology."<sup>11</sup> Theology becomes in this perspective the Christian theory of political praxis or a political theology.<sup>12</sup> As J. B. Metz points out, this political theology is not proposed as a new discipline of theology. It should rather remind theology of the Church's liberating function in human society by criticizing and helping to relativise particular historical realizations on the basis of its eschatological hope.<sup>13</sup>

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9. K. Rahner, HThTl, I, 7. - Unless otherwise indicated, translations of foreign language passages are mine.

10. J. Moltmann, *Umkehr zur Zukunft*, Munich, 1970, 154.

11. J. Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, Munich, 1972, 30.

12. J. B. Metz, *Zur Theologie der Welt*, Mainz, 1978 (1968), 99-115. Cf. also J. Moltmann, op. cit., 164-165.

13. Cf. J. B. Metz, "Politische Theologie", HThTl, VI, 52ff.



The question we have to ask now is whether theology is true to its professed aim to be a *practical theory*, and how and to what extent it has thematized the praxis dimension of Christianity. If we take theology as a whole, the practical demands of the Christian message for the life of individual Christians and the Churches receive some attention in moral and pastoral theology, and Church history investigates the various practical realizations of Christian belief. Modern Biblical studies have shown the Biblical message to be the result of a historical process, and not a direct, word by word, revelation of God. It bears, therefore, the imprint of the life situation in which it originated, developed, and was systematized and conditioned by the socio-political and religious interests of those involved in the process. We can hardly overestimate the liberating value of this realization, though it remains to be asked whether the impact was adequately felt in theology as a whole, especially in its systematic form, or whether the latter is rather a check on the more critical and unprejudiced intents of the Biblical sciences.

The question is all the more important when we consider the dialectic relationship of theory and praxis, of which we have a better, though by no means complete or definitive understanding today.<sup>14</sup> This is an outcome of the anthropological turn of knowledge theory since Kant and the thematization of the theory-praxis dialectics since Marx! Our knowledge of reality is not the mirrored reflection of the essences of things but an active, more or less schematic, modelling of reality mediated by our language and life situation and influenced by practical interests. Marx's criticism of old materialism for its understanding of reality "only in the form of the *object* or *contemplation*; but

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14. For a perceptive analysis of the whole problem cf. G. Hasenhüttl's study published in this issue of *Jeevadhara*. Cf. also M. Horkheimer, "Traditionelle und kritische Theorie" and "Nachtrag", in *Kritische Theorie, Eine Dokumentation*, Frankfurt a. M., 1968, 137-200; T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, Frankfurt a. M., 1966: "Marginalien zu Theorie und Praxis", in *Stichworte, Kritische Modelle 2*, Frankfurt a. M., 1969, 169-191; J. Habermas, *Theorie und Praxis*, Frankfurt a. M., 1973; H. Marcuse, *Der eindimensionale Mensch*, Neuwied, 1970, 1971, 102ff. (English 1964), 139 ff; *Kultur und Gesellschaft*, I, Frankfurt a. M.,



not as *sensuous human activity, as practice*" and his repudiation of idealism because "it does not know sensual reality as such" in spite of its having developed the "*active side*" of the matter "in opposition to materialism" can serve as a corrective to an abstract and one-sided theoretical understanding of man and history.<sup>15</sup> Even the "sensual world" prior to man and independent of him genetically "is not a thing given direct from all eternity and always the same since the beginning of time, but the product of industry and the state of society."<sup>16</sup> Therefore, neither man nor the world can be understood except "as a historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations" developing their industry and their intercourse and modifying their social organisation according to the changed needs.<sup>17</sup> Politics, law, morality, religion and philosophy are all dependent on historical practice, above all on the dialectics of productive forces and conditions of production and cannot be understood independently of these. To treat philosophy or religion as an autonomous product of consciousness, independent of historical praxis, is illusory; to interpret such social realities as private property, exploitation and oppression as a *natural* state of affairs, not as the result of a historical practice would be *ideological*; for it would legitimize, in effect, situations that can and must be changed.<sup>18</sup> We forget that the ruling class "which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production" and can make their ideas "the ruling ideas of the epoch".<sup>19</sup> Though this control is never so total or absolute, as Marx might seem to mean, we cannot but agree to the need of considering ideas and beliefs in the context of human praxis or history, in which they originate and develop, and of criticizing them in view of their knowledge-governing interests. It is in this sense that we should understand Marx's well-known dictum: "The philosophers have

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15. K. Marx, *Thesen über Feuerbach*, These 1, Werke, III, Berlin, 1962, 5.

16. K. Marx, *Deutsche Ideologie*, *ibid.*, 43. The translation is taken from *Karl Marx, 1818-1968*, Bad Godesberg, 1968.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Cf. *ibid.*, 26-27.

19. *Ibid.*, 46. Cf. also 47-48.



only interpreted the world differently, the point is to change it."<sup>20</sup> For human praxis is man's conscious acting upon reality, human and non-human, and theory or knowledge, however socially conditioned it may be, is not necessarily *totally* conditioned; it can thus take into account, imperfectly though, its conditionedness and the social or practical factors responsible for the conditioning, and so contribute to the lifting of conditions that enslave and alienate man.

Human praxis and theory are, therefore, *dialectically* bound to and condition one another, and the one may not be identified with or reduced to the other. In the same way, theory cannot be subordinated to praxis or praxis to theory, as if the one — theory or praxis — were something absolute, and the other its mere reproduction (reflection) or application (consequence). Theory, as we saw, is not a mere reflection of what praxis or life or reality is but a creative grasping of what praxis — life or reality — *is*, what it *can* and *should* be. Similarly, praxis, understood comprehensively as human praxis, is not — or is not to be — a mere consequence of a certain understanding (of man, the world or God) or an application of a given theory, as any given theory or knowledge is inadequate as regards the reality of praxis and *vice versa*. To subordinate theory to praxis or praxis to theory would be to *absolutize* one of the two dimensions of man's being. This would exempt it from the ongoing, therefore necessarily incomplete and imperfect, process of the theory-praxis dialectics and would immunize it against critical examination. As a result, either the process of theory will be arbitrarily blocked by an absolutized praxis, or the development of praxis will be blocked by a theory accepted as absolute and above criticism, whereas a theory needs to be checked and developed in the course of its practical realization, just as praxis needs to be reflected upon and criticized by theory. This, the absolutization or separation of the one from the other will have an inhibiting impact on both, and as a result, on the *free development* of man and society. Of course, the theory-praxis dialectics is not thereby cancelled: the impression of a standstill is apparent rather than real; the dialectics go on, but it does so in a distorted manner.

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20. K. Marx, *Thesen uber Feuerbach*, These 11, op. cit., 7.



Therefore, owing to the necessarily related, dialectic nature of theory (knowledge, conviction, belief) and praxis (action, behaviour, life), the proper understanding of human realities, whether ideas or events, would require their investigation in terms of the theory-praxis dialectics, though the extent of this may vary from one discipline to another. Professedly concerned as it is with the scientific investigation of a historical reality with an avowedly *practical* programme, theology needs to consider, perhaps more than other disciplines, its object in terms of the theory-praxis dialectics. In spite of a gradually increasing recognition of this and welcome programmatic beginnings in the direction, much theology today, if not most, is onesided in this respect. This is especially the case with systematic theology which concerns itself with Christianity or Christian faith as a whole. And the situation naturally has its impact on the more historical branches of theology like Biblical studies and Church history as well as on the more practically oriented branches like morals, Church law and pastoral theology.

## II. Theories of Christianity

### 1. Karl Rahner

There are few theologians today who would stress the rationality of Christian belief so strongly as Rahner<sup>21</sup>. For Rahner Christian faith is not a particular instance of human rationality.<sup>22</sup> It is the most original and perfect self-realization of reason.<sup>23</sup> The dynamism of knowledge and freedom means that man transcends all particular objects and their totality. Rahner contends that a transcendental reference to an ineffable and incomprehensible mystery is implied in every act of knowledge and freedom. This absolute mystery, the reference to which is no additional possibility but the condition of the possibility of all knowing and freedom, we call God. On account of his self-transcendence, man has the capacity, indeed the natural desire, to receive the unmerited gift of God's self-communication which can thus fulfil him in the

21. SchTh, V, 56.

22. "Glaube zwischen Rationalitat und Emotionalitat", in *ist Gott noch gefragt?*, Dusseldorf, 1973, 135.

23. Ibid., 131ff.



deepest and most perfect manner possible, without altering or destroying his being.<sup>24</sup> Christianity is the acceptance of the undeserved self-gift of God, not only in grace but also in history, that is, in a manner that accords perfectly with man's own historical nature. What is implicitly and imperfectly realized in other religions, and in man's loving acceptance of his human existence, is explicitly and perfectly realised in Christianity. Christianity is the absolute, unique and unsurpassable expression and realization of God's self-gift and man's acceptance of it, while other religions and the positive acceptance of humanity are less explicit and less perfect realizations of the same and deserve the appellation of anonymous Christianity.<sup>25</sup>

In a lexicon article,<sup>26</sup> Rahner considers first what Christianity is as seen from outside and enumerates the characteristics that distinguish it from all other religions; the actual convergence of initially independent historical traditions in a genuine unity; the pure representation of the essence of religion in contrast to religions which are depraved as well and which lack the official authority that Christianity has to prevent inner depravity in an absolutely critical manner; the at least relatively best concrete religion that can be known objectively though partly *a priori* and partly *a posteriori* arguments. These, Rahner claims, make the absolute assent to Christianity an obligatory possibility (c 1104). However, in the exposé that follows, Rahner concerns himself with what Christianity claims to be rather than what it is as seen from outside. In the first place, Christianity is conscious of its *universal* mission which embraces all, irrespective of geographical, racial or cultural divergences (c 1104-1105). In fact, Christianity considers itself to be the only one religion founded by God. In contrast to it, other religions, though expressive of God's salvific will, are defective and temporary. Secondly, Christianity understands itself as a *historically revealed* religion (c 1106). The reality it brings and the truth it proclaims as God's revelation happened at definite points of space and time (the prophets and Christ).

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24. Cf. SchTh, IV, 209-236; HThTi, VI, 61-63.

25. C. SchTh, V, 16-18, 136-158.

26. "Christentum", in LThK (abbreviated to C) 1100-1115.

The same article is reproduced in HThTi, I, 381-398,



Historical as he is, man is thus referred back to the historical event of revelation which is at once the object and the ground of his faith. The historically concrete word and sacrament of Christianity constitute the most immediate and actual event of encounter between God and man. Thirdly, Christianity considers itself to be a *dogmatic* religion (c 1107). Although the God in whom it believes is the absolute, ineffable and incomprehensible mystery, whose "last name may be uttered only in loving silence", the incomprehensibility has been expressed in words. In spite of the tentative, inadequate nature of this expression, it is absolute truth, which is guaranteed by the revealing God and it realizes what it reveals: God's graceful, forgiving, divinizing self-communication. As can be empirically ascertained, this truth has remained the same through the vicissitudes of historical change. The dogmatic development betrays, beyond all human planning and control, the working of a transcendent power. Consequently, Christianity has a formulated doctrine and a teaching authority in contrast to religions and philosophies which cannot go beyond a numinous experience or an existential perception of a nameless absolute and thus end up by fleeing into an other-worldliness instead of being the religion of the whole man. Fourthly, "Christianity conceives itself as the *eschatological* religion, i. e., it takes man's historicity and its own in radical seriousness and understands itself as absolute" (c 110 f). For it is not a phase of a still open process of man's religious history "because it is the last, unsurpassable and ultimate religion" for this world-time and has room for all that is good and genuine in other religions. However, in view of the still-to-be-realized fulfilment, Christianity is relative, provisional and on the way and helps by means of its eschatological message to relativize the world, history and progress, resists their absolutization and thus lets the world be what it is in its relative autonomy. This frees it from the dilemma of other religions, either to subdue and administer the world totally or retire from worldly commitment. Fifthly, Christianity is an *integral* religion in that its message holds good for all areas of individual and social life (c 1108). As God's historical self-revelation to all, it expresses itself in a visible Church with its offices and its hierarchical constitution, with its sacraments and its teaching; it is the full historical tangibility of God's salvific action for all.



In what he considers as the dogmatic self-awareness Christianity, Rahner specifies things generally stated in his treatment of Christianity as seen from outside (c 1108-1111). God who reveals himself as Father, Son and Spirit is himself so reality because he reveals himself as he is. Jesus Christ is at the same time God's supreme self-gift to man and man's supreme self-fulfilment. In Christ God *becomes* one with humanity and humanity one with God fully.

## 2. Hans Kung

Küng introduces his *Christ sein* as something that has developed into a "small 'Summa' of Christian faith".<sup>27</sup> The work is addressed to believers and unbelievers, to all those who seek the "unabridged truth of Christianity and Christian existence" (Cs 14). It is meant to set forth what is decisive and specific in the Christian programme for the sake of Christian practice. In the midst of the epochal revolution in Christian doctrine, moral and discipline, Küng wants to seek what is permanent: what is distinctive of Christianity as far as world religions and modern humanisms are concerned and what is common to the separate Christian Churches at the same time. Other religions may reveal truth, be "legitimate" in that they know the alienation, bondage and the unredeemed condition of man and speak of the saving grace and mercy of God (Cs 114-5). But they are not Christians, not even "anonymous" Christians. Modern humanisms are all concerned with what is true and good and beautiful, are committed to the cause of freedom, equality, brotherhood and development. But humanists are not and may not be called "anonymous Christians" (Cs 115). "*All that is true, good, beautiful and human is not Christian*" (Cs 117). Nor is all that is religious or salvific on that account alone Christian. Only that which has an explicit, positive relationship to Jesus Christ may be called Christian (Cs 117). What is specific to and unique in Christianity is the fact that it considers this Jesus as ultimate and decisive, determining, *normative* for man in all dimensions, in his relationship with God, his fellowmen and society (Cs 115). Christianity is founded on a concrete historical person, and not

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27. H. Kung, *Christ sein* (abbreviated as Cs), Munich, 1971.  
14. Cf. also *Die Kirche*, Freiburg, 1967.



on a myth, idea, principle or model. Indeed, the Christian programme is this historical person, Jesus, who in his concrete perceptibility and realizability surpasses all abstract norms and principles and who may not be surpassed or misused like myths, ideas or principles. This distinguishes Christianity from world religions and modern humanisms (Cs 536-539). For Küng world religions are characterized by unhistorical thinking, a cyclic concept of history, fatalism, other-worldliness, pessimism, passivity, casteism, lack of concern for society, traditionalism (Cs 102). Similarly, Marxism, both in its orthodox and modern variations, has failed in effecting the "proclaimed humanisation of society and the better world without exploitation and domination" (Cs 40). The same applies to scientific humanism: the technological revolutions have brought not only freedom and humanity but also new dependences and inhumanity (Cs 30-44).

The identification of the real, original Christianity with the concrete Jesus of history raises the question who or what Jesus was and is. Küng is not unaware of the difficulties of constructing a picture of the Jesus of history from the testimony we have of him in the NT writings (Cs 138 ff.). They do not represent objective documentation of Jesus' life and teaching. Küng acknowledges the difficulty of reaching back to the real words and deeds of the historical Jesus as tradition history and form criticism have demonstrated. But he holds it is nevertheless possible to reach "*the characteristic features and contours of Jesus' preaching, behaviour and destiny*" (Cs 151), though we cannot with certainty determine the year and place of his birth or death (Cs 141-142). Yet the central message is clear enough (Cs 204 ff.): He preached the imminence of God's reign, a reign of justice, freedom and peace and called men to repentance and conversion in view of the impending judgement. What is striking in Jesus' proclamation is that the judgement comes on all, on Israel, as well as the heathens. The God whom he proclaims is the God of Israel, not a thing, and so not manipulable or disposable, but a person who loves and can be loved. It is a God who acts in history, a God of goodness and salvation, a God who justifies sinners and is on the side of the poor and the weak (Cs 155 ff.). Similarly, a man must love not only his friends or relatives, but anyone who happens to be next to him and needs him, even his enemy. In fact, Jesus recapitulated the precepts in the one precept of



love: love for God and and love for one's neighbour. This means a relativization of the law, cult and customs: man is not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for man. And Jesus' life and action corresponded to what he taught (Cs 169 ff). He was not a man of the establishment, but an outsider, who criticised the mighty ones in his society. His contacts were above all with the poor and the despised, the publicans and the prostitutes. Y. Küng stresses that it would be wrong to take Jesus for a violent social revolutionary (Cs 178 ff). The revolution which Jesus advocated was based on love which included rather than excluded the adversary and which demanded from man a radical change of heart, a new mentality that should change man and his life from top to bottom. The challenge that Jesus posed in word and deed led him ultimately to death on the cross, and God raised him up from the dead (Cs 308 ff). Though mythically explained, the resurrection is not a myth, but a historical event vouched for by the experience of the apostles. The complete unity of word and deed in Jesus represents thus the cause of man as well as of God, it makes him the Christ, the absolute norm and object of "the faith of community of those who believe in him" (Cs 468).

If "the Christian programme is no one (*sic*) else than this Christ Jesus with all that he means for the life and action, suffering and death of men and of mankind" (Cs 500), the Church "as the community of those who believe in him" is called upon to realize it in its concrete historical existence. For "the ultimate criterion of the Christianity of a man is not the theory, but the practice: not how he thinks about doctrines, dogmas and interpretations, but how he acts in his daily life (Cs 370). It is thus that Küng defines the Church as "a communion in freedom, equality and fraternity." (Cs 473), Freed from slavery to law and the burden of sin, and freed for life, meaning, service, love, the Church should not seek dominion over others but solidarity with and brotherly service to, all irrespective of race, class, caste and ecclesial office. Of course, the Church has often failed to be what she should. Küng lists such historical facts as the persecution of Jews and heretics, the crusades, the Inquisition, the Church's siding with the mighty and the rich against the interests of the poor and the oppressed, her dogmatism, authoritarianism and intolerance of other views (Cs 508 ff). All this was, however, "a deviation from its authentic task", an identification with the



world (Cs 508). In their totalitarian domination over people and their sacrificing people to the system, the Christian Churches were clearly at variance with the Christian programme. This is not the case with the violent dictatorship and the merciless liquidation of opponents in communist countries (Cs 38 ff). For Christianity is essentially liberating and humanizing, and man needs it. Christian faith has practical consequences also for public life, for society (Cs 549-562).

However, emancipation is not to be equated with redemption (Cs 562 ff). The facts of unmerited sufferings, inevitable failures and death are entirely meaningless and would make the whole of human existence meaningless unless it can be shown that man can face and live through them in a meaningful way. This is possible in view of the crucified Christ who was raised from the dead. Christianity gives thus a meaning even to the negative aspects of human life, without ideologically transfiguring it. The question, *Why should one be a Christian* can be answered: *In order to be truly human!* (Cs 504) Christianity means, in fact, the assumption and abolition of other humanisms. They are affirmed, in as much as they affirm the human. They are denied, in so far as they deny the Christian, Jesus Christ himself (ibid.):

### 3. Jurgen Moltmann

Christianity is for Moltmann a movement towards the future. It is essentially a humanism of hope, criticism and change.<sup>28</sup> "Christianity is wholly, and not supplementarily, eschatology; it is hope, prospect and orientation towards what is ahead, revolution and transformation of the present." For Christian faith lives from the resurrection of the crucified Christ and expands out towards the promises of the universal future of Christ (ThH 12). For the God of Christians is "a God of hope," "a God with the future as his being-constituent (Bloch)" (ThH 12). He is in this sense completely different from the immutable "God of Parmenides" (ThH 23). The biblical revelation is not, as in other religions, a manifestation of the eternal God in an indifferent "now".

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28. J. Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung* (abbreviated to ThH), Munich, 1964; *Perspektiven der Theologie*, Munich, 1968; *Umkehr zur Zukunft*, Munich, 1979.



Moltmann attributes the levelling of the eschatological dimension of Christianity to the influence of Greek thought, especially its Logos-speculation. This is the case with what Moltmann calls "transcendental eschatology" that sees God's manifestation in the ever present reality of "God's word" (Barth) or man's existence (Bultmann) (ThH 32 ff, 39 ff). But this is not the biblical understanding of revelation, which is essentially eschatological (ThH 35 ff). Yahweh is a God who promises and thus calls the existing situation in question. Belief in Yahweh implies hope of the fulfilment of the promise and goes beyond the given situation. This means criticism of situations and structures that are defective and imperfect. A belief which hopes for the fulfilment of God's historical promises, in contrast to a belief in the mythical *primaeval* action of a God, cannot rest contented with the present reality. It cannot restrict itself to describing and interpreting it. On the contrary, it transcends the given and moves towards the future which is yet to come (ThH 75 ff). There were postponements, or inadequate or changed fulfilments of the promises, but this did not affect the reality of fulfilment (ThH 94, 115). In fact, Israel's hope became more intensive and universal with the passage of time (ThH 117 ff). In Jesus' death and resurrection God's promise became absolutely universal, and man was given a guarantee of hope for the future as the future of Christ. Thus God is known through his own historical action as the God of promise who demands our moving towards the future (ThH 104-105). Neither the world nor human existence can prove God (Th 82 ff). History is still unfinished, and natural theology is not a presupposition of faith but a possibility and a future aim of Christian hope. It is not that on which faith stands, but what it seeks. Only on the basis of God's revelation in the resurrection of the crucified Christ must belief seek the universal and immediate revelation of God (ThH 259-260). God reveals himself above all in his resurrecting the crucified Christ who died for our sins. The time now is the time of Christ's future, the time which brings justification to all who believe in him irrespective of race and nationality. The biblical traditions are thus historical traditions with a relation to the future, and this makes history possible (ThH 274). Moltmann takes the resurrection for a historical event, and refers to the appearances of the risen Christ, though here *history* will have to be understood in a broader sense that



makes room for the absolutely new and unique, and not merely the normal and the usual (ThH 160-162).

If God reveals himself in his promises as the God of the future, Christian belief is to become the creative hope that leaves behind what *is* and moves towards what is promised. Founded on the unique and irrepeatable event of the resurrection of the crucified Christ, "Christian hope is resurrectional hope" and it demonstrates its truth in that it contradicts sin and death, suffering and disunity by virtue of the future of justice, life, glory and peace which it proclaims and guarantees (ThH 16 ff). "One who sets his hope in Christ cannot reconcile himself with the given reality; he begins rather to suffer in it, to contradict it. Peace with God means dissension with the world, for the sting of the promised future gnaws inexorably in the flesh of every unfulfilled present" (ThH 17). "Hope makes the Christian community a constant disquiet in human societies which would like to establish themselves as a "lasting city". It makes the community the source of ever new impulses for the realization of justice, freedom and humanity here on earth in the light of the proclaimed future, which is to come. Christianity is in this sense an 'exodus' community, a community "on the way" to its promised future. It is this future that defines its present mission. The Christ event to which it is bound in anamnesis, and proclamation being historical rather than mythical, Christianity is prospective, not retrospective. The Bible has to be interpreted not in terms of a centre which it does not, in fact, have, but in view of its present mission and in view of the future of Christ (ThH 260-61). This means that Christianity is no flight into the interiority of the individual self. Nor is it an unconditional accommodation of the world by supporting, conserving and stabilising existing social or political set-ups. God's reign has begun its realisation in the resurrection of Christ, in the process of the coming together of Jews and pagans, Greeks and barbarians, free men and slaves in obedient belief, in the forgiveness of sins, and in man's reconciliation with God (ThH 303). Therefore, Christian salvation means the realization of the eschatological *hope for justice, the humanization of man, the socialization of humanity, and of peace for the whole creation* (ThH 303). Christianity has often lost sight of this worldly aspect of its mission of reconciliation and has conveniently



accommodated itself to existing circumstances, leaving the earthly-bound eschatological dimension to extremists and enthusiasts. It is in this sense that Moltmann envisages a theology that would see Christianity as a world-changing dynamism of eschatological hope, a critical hope, a critical, praxis-oriented eschatological or political theology: For the "theologian is not concerned merely to *interpret* the world, history and human life differently, but to *change* it in expectation of their divine transformation" (ThH 74). The critical and world changing function of theology – and of Christian faith – comes more to the forefront in Moltmann's later work on *The Crucified God*.<sup>29</sup> The cross which was already prominent in the *Theology of Hope* becomes here the centre of Christian theology. The function it has to fulfil is critical and aimed at liberating man from all structures of oppression and unfreedom, psychological, economic or political.

#### 4. Wolfhart Pannenberg

Pannenberg resembles Rahner in his strong emphasis on the rationality of Christian belief,<sup>30</sup> whose meaning and truth theology has to examine in the context of universal history. Belief is not blind credulity, a leap into the unknown, but a reasonable trust with a basis in reality (GsTh 233–236). If God is the God of all reality, it must be possible to know him from all reality as well (GsTh 238ff, WTh 303 ff). The encounter with Greek philosophy with its concept of God as the first principle and origin of the cosmos was thus a welcome and necessary step in the universalization of the Christian God (GsTh 308). But with the anthropological turn of modern thought, it is no longer possible to start from the world and proceed to God as ancient and medieval thought did.<sup>31</sup> On account of the historical nature of the world and the changing and developing it undergoes, it is necessary that we view reality as history and seek God in it. Now to see reality as a history is to see it as a unity; it is to

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29. *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, Munich, 1972.

30. W. Pannenberg, "Dogmatische Thesen zur Lehre von Offenbarung", in *Offenbarung als Geschichte* (abbreviated to OG), Göttingen, 1961, 100–192; *Grundlagen systematischer Theologie* (abbreviated to GsTh), Göttingen,<sup>2</sup> 1971 (<sup>1</sup>1969); WTh, *passim*.

31. W. Pannenberg, *Glaubensbekenntnis* (abbreviated to Gb), Hamburg, 1972, 29 ff.; WTh, 307 ff.



see particular events united into or forming a meaning-totality, though they retain their contingent individuality. This meaning-totality can be guaranteed only transcendently, that is, by a reality that determines everything, and that is God. Therefore, without thinking of God, there is no possibility of thinking of the unity of history (GsTh 73-75). In fact, "history is the broadest horizon of Christian theology. All theological questions and answers have their meaning in the framework of the history which God has with mankind and through it with his whole creation moving towards a future, which is as yet hidden from the world, but in reality already revealed in Jesus Christ" (GsTh 22). This has to be defended against the existentialist retreat from the objective happenings of world history to an experience of the significance of history in the historicity of individuals (Bultmann, Gogarten) as well as against the concept of salvation history and its incarnational variant (Barth) with their flight from the history we know and live to a supra-history (GsTh 22ff, 61 ff). Both amount ultimately to a separation of Christian faith from historical research and rational thinking and cannot face the challenge of modern thought. Pannenberg shows how the acceptance of the Bible as the word of God has itself become problematic with the emergence of historical criticism (GsTh 12-21). The words of the Bible can no longer be viewed as clear and unambiguous as they were for Luther and early Protestantism. On the contrary, the meaning of Biblical texts can be understood only in the context in which they originated and developed, and the fact that we do not quite share the experience and thought patterns of the Biblical writers means a bridging of or a communication between different ways of thinking - ours and those of the Biblical tradition. Moreover, if theology is to be scientific, it cannot start from Biblical statements or present them as absolutely certain and authoritative; it must rather treat its premises as problematic, debatable hypotheses capable of, and requiring, some kind of confirmation. It is not enough to say that it is God's word; we have to show that it really is this in a double sense: that it is the proper understanding of the Biblical tradition and that it is valid in the light of our total experience and knowledge.

Pannenberg contends that such an attitude is no mere concession to modern thinking but is part and parcel of the



Biblical tradition which is a historical one: "for the God of the Bible is the God of history, and the understanding of the world as historical is that conception of reality which the biblical understanding of God disclosed to mankind" (GsTh 21). God's revelation is not to be conceived as a supranatural or supra-historical intervention of God in the world or as an existential awakening or insight in the intimate spheres of isolated individuals. The biblical God reveals himself in history, and this has to do not only with the existential sphere of individuals but also with the concrete history of mankind, which is essentially social and material as well. In his programmatic essay on "Revelation as History" Pannenberg argues that Biblical revelation is not a direct self-revelation, that is, a direct revelation of the essence of God (OG 91-95). Though the Bible knows theophanies and God's speaking to man in words, these are secondary and not very prominent. According to the Bible, God reveals himself indirectly through historical events such as the exodus, the gift of the Promised Land and the conquest of enemies. The revelation events then consist of God's promise and its historical fulfilment. Even promises not fulfilled in the sense in which they were expected to be do not lead to disappointment but to new modified and intensified hopes and expectations. Thus the history of Israel has its unity in that it is a history of God's promise to his people, the people's response of hopeful obedience and the fulfilling events (OG 96-98). In the course of time, especially with the apocalypics the promise becomes God's universal judgement, and the whole of history is seen from the point of the end-fulfilment. This reaches a culmination in Jesus' fate and resurrection. But how can we know the whole of history, since the history has not yet reached its end, its ultimate fulfilment? Pannenberg claims that Jesus' fate and resurrection constitute the anticipatory happening of the eschatological fulfilment. Jesus' resurrection is a historical event we can know and ascertain and not a myth. It is attested by witnesses like Paul. Of course, the postulate of the fundamental similarity of historical events would not allow resurrection to be historical, but Pannenberg argues that this is too narrow a view which misses the fundamental characteristic of all history. This consists in the emergence of the *new*, indeed, the radically new, which cannot be reduced to the old (Gb 11 f-123). Therefore, the regularity of natural phenomena which makes



science possible has to be seen rather in the light of history, and not *vice versa*. God's revelation reaches its unique, unsurpassable summit in Jesus and God reveals himself in his resurrection as the God of history, as the God who is coming, and whose reign is to be hopefully expected. This, contends Pannenberg, is pivotal to the understanding of universal history as a unity (OG 104-105).

From now on history goes on in the power of the risen Jesus, and those who accept him in faith as the Christ, as God's supreme though yet to be fulfilled revelation, form a community with him. Christianity consists of people united with Jesus Christ in faith and trying to live according to his spirit in the hope of the coming kingdom (Gb 158 ff.). God's reign may not, of course, be identified with the Church: the Church is rather the fellowship of men with Christ mediated through words and actions. "As a fellowship of men, who have been given the courage to an unconditional trust in the future of God's dominion, the Christian Church continues the history of the Israelite-Jewish community, in so far as it was also already shaped by the hope for God's future and his reign" (Gb 161). As the community of believers in Christ who wait for God's reign and live their present life in this expectation, "the Church is the beginning of a new humanity, which grasps already now the determination of man in view of God's future and his will to love which expresses it for all men" (Gb 161). It is by losing sight of the "horizon of God's reign in understanding the Church as communion with and in Jesus" that we have developed the narrow piety of a world-fleeing esoteric sect, of a union to further common religious needs, of a clerical salvation institution (Gb 161-62). The hope for God's reign that transcends the narrow confines of the Church can and should open it to the whole of mankind, and also to the problems of the social and political realization of man's communal living. The hope for God's reign in its OT beginnings referred clearly to a reign of peace and justice and so to a truly human community of men. The futuristic, hope-filled character of Christian faith should also help us to avoid all absolutism of a particular institution or form of life but relativize everything in view of the coming reign. The call to holiness obliges the Church to look toward to a life of love, as the God of the Bible is holy



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in his love, in the coming of his kingdom into and for the world. The Church has often forgotten this, and has resorted to forms of domination, to the point of violence and bloodshed, and has justified inhuman situations by the cultivation of an *unmerciful* piety. We cannot deny the catastrophic, often world-historical consequences of "the anti-Christian turns of post-Christian history" (OG 106).

### III. Christian Praxis

Notwithstanding differences in approach and details, the theologians considered in the previous section are unanimous in viewing Christianity as something to be lived rather than merely to be believed in. It remains, therefore, to be asked whether the reality of Christian life can sustain the claims made on behalf of Christian belief.<sup>32</sup> If there is a discrepancy between the two, it is necessary to examine why it is there. This is something that receives no adequate attention in most theories of Christianity. Here, attention is restricted to the following not so comfortable aspects of Christian praxis that seem to challenge theology's unqualified assertion of the liberating, reconciling and humanizing character of Christian belief:

1. Christianity's intolerance of other views, 2. its failure to champion the cause of the poor and oppressed and its flirtation with wealth and power, 3. the anti-sexual bias of Christian morality.

#### 1. A history of intolerance

The Second Vatican Council declared officially the right of every person to religious freedom.<sup>33</sup> It is, however, a sad fact that

32. For the entire section of the different standard works of Church History, H. Jedin (ed.), *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte*, 5 vols, Freiburg, 1962 ff.; L. J. Rogers, R. Aubert, M.D. Knowles, *Geschichte der Kirche*, 5 vols Einsiedeln, 1963 ff.; H. v. Campenhausen, *Kirchengeschichte*, 2 vols, Tübingen, 1960; W. v. Loewenich, *Die Geschichte der Kirche*, Witten, 1957. It must be said, however, that works of Church History are not always free from a tendency to play down the negative facts of Christian praxis.

33. Vatican II, *Dei unitatis humanae personae*, art. 2.



Christianity has more often violated than protected man's freedom to believe, practise and express his religious convictions.<sup>34</sup> Christians had once to plead for religious tolerance, as they were discriminated against and persecuted for not sharing the state religion of Rome. With Constantine's edict of Milan in 314 A.D. the situation changed completely. Christians became adherents of a privileged religion. In 380 A.D. Christianity was made the only legitimate religion of the state. Temple worship was forbidden under capital punishment or exile, and pagan shrines were plundered and destroyed. Non-Christians were even deprived of their rights, or forced to be converted. This practice was imitated by France and Germany from the 6th century onwards and the German tradition of sacred kingship favoured the development. Christian rulers became the protectors and propagators of Christian belief, and expansionist wars received religious sanction through the Christianization that followed. The forced conversion of conquered Saxons by Charles the Great is well known. This was continued with all violence and brutality through the Crusades with their "baptism or death" policy to the colonialist expansion of modern times and the forced conversion of American Indians.

Jews were almost always a favourite target of Christian intolerance and persecution.<sup>35</sup> Already the Theodosian Codex (5th cent.) banned Jews from all state offices. Justinian declared them destitute of all rights and introduced the practice of forced conversion. The Seventeenth Council of Toledo declared all Jews to be slaves, and the Third Lateran Council threatened Christians living with Jews with excommunication. The Jews were accused of all possible crimes from the desecration of consecrated hosts to the ritual murder of children. The discrimination and persecution of Jews reached a climax during the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition. The reformers did not lag behind Catholics

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34. For an objective analysis of the problem from the viewpoint of comparative religion cf. G. Mensching, *Toleranz und Wahrheit in der Religion*, Munich-Hamburg, 1966.

35. Cf. Heer, *Gottes erste Liebe; 1000 Jahre Judentum und Christentum*, Munich-Esslingen, 1967; H. Huss-A. Schröder (eds.), *Antisemitismus: Zur Geschichte der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt, 1965; W. Holsten, "Antisemitismus", RGG, I, 456-459.



in anti-Semitism. Luther, for instance, recommended the burning of the synagogues and the demolition of Jewish homes.<sup>36</sup> Most of the Nazi atrocities against Jews culminating in the liquidation of about six million people were in some form or other anticipated in the history of Christianity.

Christians were not less intolerant towards fellow Christians who held a different view of Christian belief.<sup>37</sup> As soon as Christianity became the State religion, heresies became a crime against the State as well.<sup>38</sup> All deviation from the "right doctrine" were punished, and death sentences were not rare. The Inquisition, which dates back to the Carolingian period, was centrally organized in the 12th century, and the Holy Office was put in charge of it. Pope Innocent III and the Fourth Lateran Council issued regulations concerning the trial and punishment of heretics, and these became more rigorous and more inhuman in course of time. Christians were asked to report heretics for inquisition. The State authority was bound, under the pain of excommunication, not to let condemned heretics escape death, usually by being burnt. If the "heretic" repented, he could escape, but he had then to accept some kind of severe public penance that could last for the whole of his life. Inquisition was practised above all in Spain, Portugal and South France. It was operative in the Iberian world and the Papal States till the first

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36. Cf. J. Kahl, *Das Elend des Christentums: Plädoyer für eine Humanität ohne Gott*, Reinbeck, 1968, 39.

37. The practice has now lost some of its brutality, but it is not extinct. In fact, it still acts as a check on the Christian's freedom of thought and expression. Cf. A. Koothottil, "The Pilgrimage of Freedom", *Jeevadhara* 15, 1973, 273-290. "Anybody who comes up with anything new is judged alien and found guilty; the whole system is immediately alerted. From a natural desire, as it were, for survival, the new thought is immediately stifled... In Vatican II, there was a general awakening, and freedom of the spirit began to appear again; but we are unaccustomed to it and to the problems in which it would involve us. We and the Church therefore tend to slide back into the security of captivity rather than go forward with daring to face the insecurity of freedom" - *ibid.*, 290.

38. G. Mensching, *op. cit.*, 44-51; 53-68; W. Nigg, *Das Buch der Ketzer*, Zurich-Stuttgart, 1962; H. Grundmann, *Ketzergeschichte des Mittelalters*, Gottingen, 1963.



half of the nineteenth century. Where whole communities were involved, Crusades were organized to protect the unity of the faith by conquering, and often massacring the dissidents, as happened in the case of the Albigensians of South France. The reformed Churches too did not hesitate to resort to inquisitorial measures with the help of state authority. Calvin managed to get the Spanish physician Servet burned alive for denying the trinitarian dogma, and Luther advocated capital punishment for all heretics.

It would be naive to ignore the socio-economic and political interests that played a role in the forced conversion of non-Christians. This is equally true of the Inquisitional trial of heretics and Jews. We should not forget that after Constantine the Church and State were so intimately bound to one another as to form one social reality which sought to preserve its unity at all costs, and this meant often the brutal suppression of differences in belief and practice.<sup>39</sup> But the unity which the Church and State formed in the Middle Ages was not without its parallels in Biblical tradition.<sup>40</sup> In Israel, the king was God's representative too and was bound to defend and protect the interests of faith. Yahweh asks Saul, for instance, to destroy the Amalekites for their attack on the Israelites who were on their way from Egypt: "Go now and fall upon the Amalekites and destroy them. . . . Spare no one; put them all to death, men and women, children and babes in arms, herds and flocks, camels and asses" (1 Sam. 15:3). No matter how we may interpret Christianity's claim to absolute validity and uniqueness, it cannot be denied that this could prompt Christians to believe, in all seriousness, that there could be no salvation outside the Church. It is not unnatural, then, to try to bring even by the use of force all those outside the Church, or deviating from its teachings, to the right faith without which they would perish. Augustine justified the use of force in religious matters by appealing to Lk

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39. Mensching *op. cit.* 116-125,

40. H. Gross, "Theorkratie", in *LThK*, X, 56-57; G. Mensching, "Theokratie", in *RGK*, VI, 752-753.



14; 23 (Cogite intrare, "make them come in");<sup>41</sup> according to him, Christians persecuted out of love whereas the godless did so out of cruelty.<sup>42</sup> The belief that the Jews were responsible for the murder of Jesus was so deep-rooted in Christian consciousness that it could not but erupt in anti-Semitic explosions. It is not accidental that Holy Week especially was a time of anti-Semitic violence and bloodshed. Christian apologetics did much to foster hatred and prejudice against the Jews. John Chrysostom's words are a typical example of prejudiced polemics: "The Jew is a murderer of prophets, a murderer of Christ, a murderer of God. The Jew worships the devil. Jews are drunkards, fornicators, criminals." What Chrysostom has to say of the synagogue is in the same strain: "One may call it brothel, the abode of depravity, devil's asylum, Satan's fort, the ruin of the soul..."<sup>43</sup>

It is clear that Christianity's claim to uniqueness and absolute validity is Biblical.<sup>44</sup> Nor is the Christian's contempt for other religions entirely unbiblical. Paul is emphatic in affirming that salvation is possible only through faith in Jesus (Rom 3:22-28), and he demands that "every tongue confess, Jesus Christ is Lord", to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:11). The pagans are said to be subject to all possible vices and iniquities: "They are filled with every kind of injustice, mischief, rapacity and malice; they are one mass of envy, murder, rivalry, treachery and malevolence, whisperers and scandal-mongers, hateful to God, insolent, arrogant, and boastful; they invent new kinds of mischief, they show no loyalty to parents, no conscience, no fidelity to their plighted word; they are without natural affection and without pity" (Rom 1:29-32). It is difficult to find out if the pagans Paul knew were so depraved as to

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41. Cf. Ep. 93:5; 173:10.

42. Cf. Ep. 185; H. Bornkam, "Toleranz II: In der Geschichte des Christentums, in RGG, VI, 934-946; P. Mikat, "Inquisition", in LThK, 698-702.

43. Quoted by Kahl, op. cit. 36-37.

44. W. Kasper, "Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums", in HThTl, I, 36-37. But is this claim to absolute validity indispensable to the Christian's commitment to Jesus? Cf. G. Hasenuttl's discussion of the problem in *Christentum ohne Kirche*. Aschaffenburg, 1972, 30-44.



deserve this whole catalogue of vices. Even if they were, indiscriminate, wholesale condemnation of a whole section of people can hardly be justified, and it is likely to breed unwarranted prejudices. Though he did not hold that Israel was finally abandoned by God, Paul did not hesitate to say that they "killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out, the Jews who are heedless of God's will and enemies of their fellow men... All this time they have been making up the full measure of their guilt, and now retribution has overtaken them for good and all" (1 Thes 1:14-16). The Gospels' polemic against the Pharisees seems at least partly an expression of the struggles of the early Christians against the parent Jewish community. The tendency to discriminate against the Jews as a whole reaches its culmination in John: Jesus is the truth that came into the world (Jn 14: 6), and the Jews, who do not receive him, are neither God's nor Abraham's children; on the contrary, they have the devil as their father (Jn 8:31-47). In his zeal for the Gospel Paul was equally hard on those who differed from him: "But if anyone, if we ourselves or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel at variance with the gospel we preached to you, let him be accursed" (Gal 1: 8). In his second letter to the community at Corinth, Paul condemns those who preach a different message as "sham-apostles, crooked in all their practices, masquerading as apostles of Christ"; they are, in fact, agents of Satan, masquerading as agents of the good (2 Cor 11:13-15).

The Jesus of the Gospels was in no way a man of the establishment, and his words and deeds imply a criticism of narrow-minded legalism and intolerance towards those who do not follow the law accurately.<sup>45</sup> Yet the absolute obedience which is claimed for his message, a characteristic of prophetic radicalism, is exclusivist and can easily take on intolerant features. This is the case with the absoluteness or uniqueness of Yahweh in the OT. In the earlier stages of the OT tradition, Yahweh enjoins Israel not to have any other gods beside him, because "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Ex 20:2); but he does not deny the existence of

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45. A. Holl gives a vivid, though somewhat overdrawn, picture of Jesus' fellowship with the outsiders of his society. Cf. *Jesus in schlechter Gesellschaft*, Stuttgart, 1971.



other gods. The intensive absoluteness or uniqueness implied in these words becomes universal with the prophets and takes on the characteristics of a claim to extensive absoluteness. Yahweh becomes the God of all and the only true God: Psalm 96: 5 says: "For the gods of the nations are idols every one, but the Lord made the universe." These are in fact, no gods (Jer 2:11 ff); they are mere idols: "their land is filled with idols, and they bow down to the work of their hands, what their fingers have made" (Is 2:8). The uncomfortable facts of Christian intolerance are thus a result of the interaction of several factors of a practical as well as theoretical nature, and these have their roots far back in Biblical traditions.

## 2. The flirtation with power and wealth

We have seen how theologians interpret Christian belief as an essentially historical, liberating, humanizing message. Christianity has to be lived in this world, and concretized in the social life of man. We shall take a brief look at the Christian impact on the socio-economic realm and examine the nature of Christian influence in this area. There is no denying the great contribution Christianity - Christian Churches and Christians - has made and is still making to the alleviation of human misery. The works of charity or mercy that help alleviate poverty, ignorance and disease have a long tradition dating back to the time when the early Christians, collected money to support the poor (Rom. 15: 25 ff cor 16: 2; Gal. 2: 10), and the OT injunction to be open-handed to the poor and distressed in the country (Dt 15:11). However, as regards the suppression of conditions that fostered poverty and distress, we cannot say that Christianity has, as a rule, been on the side of the poor and oppressed.<sup>46</sup> Apart

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46. For all its charitable activities, even today, Christianity's attitude to the poor seems to be ambiguous. What Samuel Rayan says of the Indian scene may well apply to many other countries: "We are at least beginning to realize that our prestige schools with high rate of fees and English for medium of instruction cater mostly to the highest class and equip them to consolidate their acquired positions of power and privilege; while the rest of our educational institutions give a training too old and faded to be of real significance today... In the village the wealth of the



from scattered protests, Christianity did not find it necessary to challenge the inhuman practice of slavery.<sup>47</sup> In fact, Christians, monks, priests and popes included, found the system useful and made good use of it. True, slaves were at times freed either as a reward for long and true service or in view of Church office but these were exceptions rather than the rule. The colonial expansion starting with the Spanish and Portugese colonization of other continents and trade with them saw an unprecedented flowering of the slave trade. Pope Nicholas V sanctioned the enslavement of conquered people by his bull *Dum Diversas* of 1452. Innocent VIII accepted a gift of slaves from Queen Isabella of Spain in 1487; and Paul III recognised the right of all, including Churchmen, to own slaves. The reformers too had no qualms in allowing and fostering slavery. No wonder that "black ivory" became the main trade item from the African Ivory Coast, particularly because America demanded more and more slaves, and all navigating nations participated in the trade. The total number of slaves exported in three and a half centuries is estimated to have been thirty million and just as many must have died during transportation or catch."<sup>48</sup> Till the late 18th century the papal state enjoyed the service of negro slaves and the Benedictines in Brazil held slaves up to 1864. It was in the

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mission is used for the poor and for their defence. But when these poor take a look at the city they are shocked to find the Church there serving and equipping precisely those whom she is fighting in the village". - "Wealth and Power and the Catholic Church in India", in *Jeevadhara* 16, 1973, 356.

On the basis of a sociological research in Kerala, G. Lemer-cinier and F. Houtart have pointed out how the interests of institutionalized charity and social service prompt Churchmen to adopt a negative attitude towards efforts aimed at the reform or overthrow of structures that perpetuate the poverty and misery the Church tries to alleviate. Cf. *Church and Development in Kerala: Analysis of the Developmental Activities of the Roman Catholic Church*, Cochin, 1974, 267-268, 270.

47. Cf. H. D. Wendland, "Sklaverei und Christentum", in RGG, VI, 101-104; B. M. Biermann, "Sklaverei II: Sozialgeschichtlich", in LThK, IX, 819-822; W. Buhlmann, "Sklaverei und Mission", *ibid.*, 822-823.

48. Biermann, *art. cit.*, 821.



course of the nineteenth century that the Christian nations of the West began to realize the inhumanity of the whole institution and set about abolishing it. This was to cause tensions and splits not only among Christian nations but also in the Christian Churches. But this is not surprising in view of the prevalent theological view that considered slavery as something natural and legitimate. Thomas Aquinas justified slavery by referring to Aristotle.<sup>49</sup> For Augustine slavery was a consequence of original sin, and as such it was to remain till the end of the world.<sup>50</sup> He urged the masters to be grateful to Christ and the Church for their making bad slaves into good ones, rather than making them free. According to Tertullian freedom and slavery were insignificant in view of the one freedom in Christ that liberates man from the bondage of sin.<sup>51</sup> Ignatius of Antioch exhorted the slaves to respect their masters as God's image.<sup>52</sup>

It is likely that early Christians were recruited mostly from the poorer sections of the people. Christianity was in this sense a religion of the poor. As soon as Christianity became the official religion, first of the Roman empire and later on of the European countries, the situation began to change. Though the great majority of ordinary believers and the lower clergy came from the lower strata of society, bishops, abbots and the upper clergy were recruited, as a rule, from the richer sections of the people. Bishops became "princes of the Church", dioceses and monasteries came into possession of large territories.<sup>53</sup> It is thus natural that Christian aristocracy tried to put its own people as bishops and abbots. And the flirt with power and wealth brought with it the oppression and exploitation of the masses, especially the peasants; a situation that existed unabated till the emergence of national states and the secularization of the Church states. It was only natural in this state of affairs that Christianity, especially the official Church, found itself on the side of state

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49. Cf. S. th. 2-II, q. 57, a 3, ad 2.

50. Cf. Wendland, art. cit., 102; Kahl, op. cit., 20.

51. Cf. *ibid.*

52. Cf. *ibid.*

53. Besides the works referred to in footnote 32, cf. J. C. Manalel, "Should the Church be Poor?", in *Jeevadhara* 16, 1973, 331-338.



authorities when disputes arose between them and the exploited masses. For instance, the Peasant Revolt of 1524-25 in Germany was aimed at securing the common man a larger share in wealth and decision-making in civil and ecclesiastical matters.<sup>54</sup> The peasants based their demands – and they were not entirely wrong in that – on the authority of the Bible. Luther's reaction was typical, considering Christianity's long tradition as regards social injustices and socio-political structures. He said that the Christian had to suffer injustice rather than revolt against authority.<sup>55</sup> Luther went to the extent of characterizing the Peasant Revolt as a work of the devil, which required to be put down brutally, and promised heaven for those who suppressed it. For Luther all authority derived from God and had to be obeyed. In fact, until recent times, the socio-political set-up was for most people, not only Christians, something natural, divinely instituted, and thus *intangible*.<sup>56</sup> Poverty was viewed as a consequence of sin, something one had to bear in a spirit of penance.<sup>57</sup> If the socio-economic or political structure is seen as God-given, and if poverty is indissolubly linked up with sin, it is natural that one accepts one's condition and tries to atone for one's sins so as not to miss reward in the world to come. It is here that religion becomes "the opium of the people", the ineffective expression and protest against the misery of social injustice, a state of affairs that can and ought to be changed by effective action. Though Christianity, or any religion for that matter, cannot be said to have been an opiate, always and in every way, it cannot be denied that it was an ideology legitimizing social injustices.<sup>58</sup>

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54. Cf. G. Franz, "Bauernkrieg, 1624-25", in RGG, I, 927-930; H. U. Wehler (ed.), *Der deutsche Bauernkrieg 1924-26*, Gottingen, 1975.

55. Cf. G. Franz, art. cit., 929-930.

56. Cf. O. Nell-Breuning, "Soziale Frage und Kirche", in HThTl, VII, 85 ff.

57. The belief that poverty is indissolubly connected with sin is still alive. Cf. F. Lau, "Armut III: Ethisch, RGG, I, 627. For a criticism of this identification cf. Gremmels-Hermann, op. cit., 97-102.

58. Cf. K. Marx, *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechts philosophie*, Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe, Frankfurt, 1927 ff., I. – I, 68. Cf. also S. Kappen "Christianity and India's Development" in *Jeevadhara* 7, 1972, 47-62; esp. section V. "Indian Christianity – a Reactionary Force", 56-60.



Here again, the remedy is not a mere return to the biblical message. True, some of the prophets – Amos, Mikah, Isaiah, for example – criticized sharply the social evils of their time. Further, Jesus' commandment of love implies concrete, creative engagement for those in need. All this could be interpreted and developed to include commitment to change socio-economic and political structures that foster poverty and misery. However, the role of institutions and structures in fostering as well as hindering man's freedom and well-being was not known in Biblical tradition. Besides, the Bible contains passages that may be understood as justifying the existing states of affairs. For instance, Paul not only did not challenge the inhuman practice of slavery but also exhorted slaves to stay on in the condition in which they were called to the faith (1 Cor 7:20–22). As Christians, they should, in fact, obey their masters more perfectly and more sincerely than others (Eph 6:6 ff; Col. 3:24). The equality resulting from the Christian call is not extended by Paul to the socio-economic or political realm; it is equality in the religious sphere, and it may well serve to cover the inequality in the socio-economic and political realms. Master-slave relationship is an accepted presupposition of several of Jesus' parables as well (Mt 18:23 ff; 25:14 ff; Mk 12:42 ff; 1:7). The Old Testament too spoke of slavery approvingly: Israel was enjoined to make slaves of the people it conquered (Dt 20:10–11), and the system was regulated by legislation (Ex 21:2; Dt 15:13; Lev 19:20–22). Therefore, it would be not right to claim that the Christian ideals of human dignity, equality and justice would have at some time led necessarily to the abolition of slavery. This is also true of the structures of oppression and exploitation in the socio-economic sphere. The NT saying, "You have the poor among you always" (Mt 26:11) and its OT counterpart, "The poor will always be with you in the land" (Dt 15:11) seem to take poverty as an immutable fact of history. If so, the only thing we may do is to help the poor by works of charity, as the Dt text (15:7) recommends. In fact, for all his sympathy for the poor and despised, the Jesus of the Gospels cannot be said to have had an interest in structural changes or a socio-political revolution.<sup>59</sup>

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59. This is not to deny the revolutionary potential of some of Jesus' words and actions. Indeed, to be of service to man, Christianity needs to *develop* them critically and thus go beyond



Once Jesus is said to have refused to arbitrate in a dispute concerning a family inheritance. He does not also show much interest in the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the colonial power ruling over Palestine at that time when he gives the advice to render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God. Paul goes a step further when he demands complete submission to all authority, as "there is no authority but by the act of God, and the existing authorities are instituted by him" (Rom 13:1)<sup>60</sup>

### 3. The struggle against sex

It is no exaggeration to say that morality has been for many Christians a relentless struggle against sex. "For me the Church was the Church of the sixth commandment," says a young man in Fritz Leist's psychological documentation, *Der sexuelle Notstand und die Kirchen*.<sup>61</sup> The work is a sad account of the shame, anxiety and guilt that the sex experience meant for Christian men and women. For adolescents sex and the sexual organs were things to be ashamed of. The feeling of anxiety and guilt in the face of awakening sexual awareness continued in many cases right into their marital relations mostly as a result of an anti-sexual upbringing.<sup>62</sup> Leist's documentation is interesting in that it reveals the still persistent sexual pessimism in Christian circles in spite of a general relaxation in sexual standards. But this is not surprising considering the largely negative and

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the Jesus of history. Cf. S. Kappen, "Jesus Today", in *Jeevadhara* 27, May-June 1975, 178-179: "If we retrace our steps to Jesus of Nazareth it is not to pitch our tent with him in the past but to go beyond him. We go beyond him when we free him from the historical conditioning of the Judaism of the first century, reinterpret his message in the context of our contemporary concerns, and translate it into today's language... Seen in this light the resurrection of Jesus is a continuing process achieved through our reinterpretation of his message and our commitment in response to it."

60. Cf. G. Puthumana, "A Christian Evaluation of Kerala Politics", in *Jeevadhara* 1, 1971, pp. 72-87. Also Cf. M. Kanjira-thinkal's study in this issue.

61. Munich 1972, 101.

62. Ibid., passim, sp. 49ff.



restrictive view of sex in Christian moral theology. Jone's *Katholische Moraltheologie*,<sup>63</sup> widely used by Catholic priests and seminarians till recent years, divides the human body into pure, less pure and impure parts on the basis of their capacity to arouse sexual pleasure: face, hands and legs are pure, whereas breasts, the back, arms and thighs are less pure and finally, the genitals and parts close to them are impure. The more pleasure a part of the body can arouse, the more impure it would be. It is true that Jone's formulations are somewhat extreme, but his views are in no way untypical of the casuistic morality taught to Catholic seminarians till recently. There was a general consensus that no sexual offence could be venial: that there could be no "parvitas materiae" in sexual matters.<sup>64</sup> This rigorist view, which amounts to a condemnation of sexual pleasure except where it is made legitimate by the procreative functioning of marital intercourse, was accepted without question. It was not asked how something natural to man is sinful or impure unless it is somehow, in its effects or in the way it is experienced, dehumanizing: physically, psychologically or socially. Of course, lust may be dehumanizing if it is sought without regard for the good of the whole man, but it has to be shown that a particular experience of pleasure is so, and is not simply assumed. It is interesting that the question is seldom raised by moral theology though the modern Christian tradition does not generally condemn the palatal pleasures or the holding of banquets that go beyond the preservation of physical life. The wholesale condemnation of sexual pleasure seems to follow from a general devaluation of the body and an asceticism that demands the control, and if possible, the suppression of all passion.<sup>65</sup> This devaluation of sex is connected with, and confirmed by, the priority the Catholic Church gives to the virginal or celibate state.<sup>66</sup> In spite of its emphasis on the "true equality of all Christians with regard to the dignity and to the activity for the building up of the body of Christ"<sup>67</sup>

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63. Paderborn, 13 1949 (1 1929), 190 ff.

64. Cf. For a critical study of Christian sex morality cf. S. Pfürtner, *Kirche und Sexualität*, Reinbeck, 1972.

65. Cf. *ibid.*, 46 ff.      66. Cf. *ibid.*, 49 ff.

67. Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, art. 32. The translation is from W. M. Abbot - J. Gallagher (eds), *The Documents of Vatican II*, London, 1966, 58.



Vatican II did not manage to shed the traditional doctrine of "the superiority of virginity consecrated to Christ".<sup>68</sup> Whatever be its justification, it must be said that the greater value given to virginity or celibacy as opposed to married life has a devaluing effect on the latter. In fact, Pius XII defends priestly celibacy on the ground of the purity required of priests to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice.<sup>69</sup> It would seem that sexuality is something impure which makes man unworthy of approaching the altar.<sup>70</sup> The anti-sexual bias seems to be at least one reason for the Catholic Church's adherence to priestly celibacy.<sup>71</sup> Sexuality has on the whole been tolerated rather than positively accepted and valued as something good in itself.<sup>72</sup> This is clear from the traditional doctrine which saw the primary purpose of marriage in the procreation and education of children and which considered the marital love symbolised and realised by sexual union as something secondary defined in terms of "mutual help" and a "remedy for concupiscence".<sup>73</sup> It is on the basis of this primacy of procreation—which alone justifies sexual union and sexual pleasure—that the Christian Churches opposed the practice of contraception that became a necessity with the increase of demographic pressure.<sup>74</sup> Though the Anglican Church approved of the use of contraception under certain conditions as early as 1930, and the Reformed Churches followed suit in course of time, the Catholic Church remains still officially closed to all methods of contraception except the use of the unfertile period. Pope Paul VI has reaffirmed the prohibition by stressing the necessarily "inseparable connection" of marital union and procreation in each and every marital act.<sup>75</sup> Though the Pope bases his doctrine on an abstract

68. Vatican II, *Decree on Priestly Formation*, art. 10.

69. Pius XII, Encyclical Letter, *Sacra virginitas*, AAS, 42, 1954.

70. Pfürtnner, *op. cit.*, 49ff.

71. *Ibid.*, 275–280.

72. I. L. Reiss, *Freizügigkeit, Doppelmoral, Enthaltensamkeit: Verhaltensmuster der Sexualität*, Reinbeck, 1970, 36–39; A. Schwenger, *Antisexuelle Propaganda: Sexualpolitik in der Kirche*, Reinbeck, 1971; Pfürtnner, *op. cit.*

73. Cf. *Codex Juris Canonici*, c. 1013.

74. Cf. Pfürtnner, *op. cit.*, 124–158.

75. Encyclical Letter, *Humanae vitae*, art. 12.



concept of human nature and does not take into account the specific difference of human sexuality, which is not restricted to oestrous cycles as in the case of animals and is in principle always receptive to stimulation, he is in continuity with a tradition that saw sexuality primarily in terms of its procreative function. The self-contradiction involved in the permission of the deliberate use of the unfertile period with a view to avoiding conception and the prohibition of medical or mechanical means of contraception as unnatural is in fact taken over from Pius XII, and to a lesser extent, from Pius XI.<sup>76</sup> In fact, the agony that Paul VI's anti-contraceptive decision causes to those who want to plan their families effectively, and to follow the Church teaching at the same time is rooted in a tradition reaching back to Augustine and beyond.<sup>77</sup>

The most important single influence on sexual and marriage morality in the Western Church is Augustine. Sexual pleasure is for him a consequence of Original Sin, and this is transmitted through the act of generation.<sup>78</sup> Although Augustine defended marriage against Manichaean attacks, he believed that mankind would have propagated itself in its original, paradisaic state in some other way than through the act of sexual intercourse and without sexual pleasure.<sup>79</sup> The reflex activity of bodily and sexual processes was something abominable to him. It contradicted his ideal of self-mastery. The only justification for sexual activity being progeny. Augustine condemn it as sin if performed without this end in view: "Sexual intercourse is without guilt only in as much as it is necessary for procreation... He who goes beyond this necessity, does no longer follow his reason, he follows rather his libido."<sup>80</sup> Suffering under the traumatic experience of his young love - his beloved was apparently forcibly

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76. Cf. Pfürtnner, op. cit., 132-137.

77. In interpreting *Hūmanae viāe*, many Bishops' Conferences have gone beyond Paul VI to consider the problem from the point of view of married people. - Cf. F. Podimattam, "The Dynamism of the Church's Teaching on Contraception.", in *Jeevadhara* 24, Nov. - Dec. 1974, 480-488.

78. Cf. Pfürtnner, op. cit. 46.

79. Cf. *ibid.*

80. *De bono conjugali*, 10.



separated from him – Augustine could not view sex or woman except in terms of sin and guilt.<sup>81</sup> Jerome, a contemporary of Augustine, too had an equally negative view of sex and marriage.<sup>82</sup> For Gregory of Nyssa marriage was a “regretful tragedy”,<sup>83</sup> and John Chrysostom considered it to be the result of original sin, a cloth of slavery, which has its origin “in disobedience, curse and death. For where death is, there is marriage; and where there is no marriage, there is no death”.<sup>84</sup> No wonder the contempt of sex and marriage found its expression in pastoral regulations. Pope Gregory the Great wrote in 601 to Augustine of Canterbury that the experience of pleasure and the liturgical celebrations are incompatible, as lust is always sinful, and advised that the married man should cleanse himself by means of a bath before entering the Church.<sup>85</sup> Some of the extreme penitential practices of saints and monks may be better understood in the light of their struggle against the sexual drive and the increasing threat it posed to their holiness the more they tried to suppress it.<sup>86</sup> In spite of the basic goodness of all creation, including sexuality and marriage, which Christianity officially defended, the antisexual bias has continued, through the Middle Ages to our own times, to colour Christian morality. Thomas Aquinas considered the sexual act as something beastly, as one is not there in full possession of one’s reason, and argued that marriage turns the human spirit away from full dedication to God.<sup>87</sup> It is this, perhaps, that made him claim that the prophets of the OT were bereft of the Holy Spirit while engaged in sexual intercourse.<sup>88</sup> Aquinas followed Augustine in saying that sexual intercourse was sinful, though only venially, when performed without the procreative intent.<sup>89</sup> Though Luther broke from the Church traditions in many ways and repudiated priestly celibacy,

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81. Cf. Leist, op. cit., 15–19; L. M. Weber, “Geschlechtlichkeit”, in LThK, VI, 804–805.

82. C. Pfurner, op. cit., 47.

83. *De virginitate*, 3.

84. *De virginitate*, 14.

85. Cf. Leist, op. cit., 20ff.; Pfurner, op. cit., 48.

86. Cf. Leist, op. cit., 42–46.

87. S. th. I, 98, 2, and 3; 2–II, 186, 4c.

88. S. th., 2–II, 172, 3 pract.

89. IV sent., 26, 1, 4.



he remained bound to the Augustinian view of sexuality.<sup>90</sup> Marriage was, for Luther, a hospital of the sick, granted to man on account of his pitiable weakness, and the marital duty meant necessarily sin. The admission that the marital act need not be sinful when performed without an express procreative intent was in itself revolutionary, and came into acceptance only gradually. But the old anti-sexual bias and the one-sided emphasis on the generative purpose are even now far from dead. It is in this light that we can value the partly liberating insights of contemporary Christian theology and the positive evaluation of sex by Vatican II. There is no doubt that Christianity's anti-sexual bias was fed by outside influences. We need only think of the dualistic thought of Gnosticism, the Stoic ideal of total self-control and above all the Manichaeian contempt of the body and condemnation of sex and marriage. In fact, the Christian Churches have waged "heroic battles" in defence of the basic goodness of the body and of sexuality.<sup>91</sup> The belief that all things are God's creation and as such good in spite of all depravity helped the Church to keep a certain balance against excesses. Christianity's attempt at regulating sex life should also not be condemned without discrimination. For Freud himself emphasized that the sexual drive has to be controlled in terms of the reality principle, that is, with a view to integrating it with other aspects of man's individual and social life, if it is not to become destructive in the end.<sup>92</sup> The question is only whether the restrictions are proportioned or whether they are exaggerated in such a way as to have frustrating and dehumanizing consequences. That sex life can be differently regulated and that it allows a whole range of freedom and variability is shown by the data of ethnological research. Sociological studies show that a liberalization of sexual standards need not necessarily lead to promiscuity and chaos but can very well lead to a more human and personalist sex in so far as it abolishes the double

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90. Cf. Pfurtner, *op. cit.*, 46.

91. Cf. *ibid.*, 42ff.

92. S. Freud, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1940), *Collected Works*, XIII, 6. Cf. also W. Reich, *Die Entdeckung des Orgons: Die Funktion des Orgasmus*, Frankfurt a. M., 1972, 165ff.; H. Marcuse, *Triebstruktur und Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt a. M., 19-20 referred to by Pfurtner, *op. cit.*, 235.



morality arising from an overtly restrictive sexual code.<sup>93</sup> The criticism is, therefore, not that Christianity has tried to regulate the sexual drive but that this was done often enough with an anti-sexual bias.

It may be asked whether this devaluation of sex is all due to alien influences or whether the Biblical tradition contains ideas that could lead to or confirm an anti-sexual mentality. Paul's instructions on marital relations and virginity, as we have them in 1 Cor 7, do not imply a condemnation of marriage or marital sexuality. Paul betrays, however, a certain contempt for human sexuality. He grants that marriage is not bad and permits marital relations, but this is more by way of a concession to human weakness, lest one should be tempted, lose control and engage in immoral practices (vv. 2, 5-7): It is better to marry than to burn by desire (v. 9). The later doctrine that saw in marital relations a "remedy for concupiscence" has its basis in Paul (vv. 5, 9). This is true also of the tradition that viewed marriage as a contract rather than a "community of love" and sexual union as a "debt" owed to each other rather than a natural expression of love (v. 3). In fact, Paul would like if all were celibates like himself (vv. 6-7), and advises the unmarried and widows to remain in the state in which they are (v. 8), but they could marry if they could not control themselves (v. 9). Paul's reason is theological: First, there is little time left for the parousia, and it is better to wait for it in the state in which one is (v. 29-31). Secondly, only the unmarried person is totally at the Lord's disposal: "The unmarried cares for the Lord's business; his aim is to please the Lord. But the married man cares for worldly things; his aim is to please his wife; and he has a divided mind..." (v. 32ff). It is difficult to see how these words do not imply a certain devaluation of marriage and sexuality as an apologetic exegesis would like to contend.<sup>94</sup> Similary Jesus' words in Mt 19:10ff

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93. C. S. Ford-F. A. Beach, *Formen der Sexualität: Das Sexualverhalten bei Mensch und Tier*, Reinbeck, 1968. - op. cit., 139ff. 170ff.; Pfürtner, op. cit., 34.

94. R. Schnackenburg speaks of the *impression* of a devaluation of marriage that Paul's words may create. Schnackenburg



give a certain priority to the virginal state: it is a gift "which not every one can accept". This is understandable in view of the angelic state of life after resurrection: "When they rise from the dead, men and women do not marry; they are like angels in heaven" (Mk 12: 25). The OT does not advocate celibacy or virginity as superior to marriage and thus does not devalue the latter by comparison. But according to the OT, sexual intercourse made both man and woman unclean (Lev 15:18; 1 Sam 21: 5 ff). Similarly all seminal discharge: One had to bathe oneself and remain unclean till evening (Lev 15: 16-24). Menstruation and childbirth were equally polluting (Lev 15: 19 ff; 12: 1 ff). The law enjoined capital punishment for couples engaging in intercourse when the woman had her menstrual discharge (Lev 20: 18). After childbirth a woman was unclean for forty days in the case of a male child and for eighty days in the case of a female child, and during that time she was not allowed to touch anything that was holy or to enter the sanctuary (Lev 12: 1-2). Finally, at the end of the unclean period the woman had to make an expiatory offer. Only afterwards was she clean (Lev 12: 1-8). Of course, Israel was not alone in tabooing sexual activities as ritually unclean; besides, ritual impurity is different from moral impurity. But intimately bound up as these are, it is all but natural that people come to regard sexuality as something less than good.

#### IV. The Retreat to the Essential: Theology's flight from the unpalatable aspects of Christian Belief and Life

No matter how real and undeniable the negative aspects of Christian life and theory may be, an objective, unbiased study will have to inquire whether this is all that Christianity means or whether there is a more positive side to it.<sup>95</sup> Concerned as it is

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emphasizes the historically conditioned nature of Paul's view but claims at the same time that it retains its right and value for the Christian. However, he does not show what this consists in. - Cf. "Die Ehe im Neuen Testament", in G. Krems - R. Mumm, (eds) *Theologie der Ehe*, Regensburg-Göttingen, 1969, 121-27.

95. This is the basic weakness of anti-Christian polemic. While Christian theologians see only the more positive aspects of



with the meaning, truth and relevance of Christianity, it is natural to expect of theology a theory of Christianity that takes into account all fundamental aspects of the Christian reality, practical as well as theoretical, negative as well as positive. This makes a criticism of the theological theories considered in section II inevitable, though one can never overlook the positive contribution these theologians have made to Christian theory and praxis. The picture they draw of Christianity is largely abstract and liable to ideological misuse.<sup>96</sup> This is due to a procedure that is very unhistorical and undialectical, conveniently minimizing or suppressing those aspects of Christian theory and praxis that are less than comfortable to remember and selectively appropriating and retrojectively interpreting those aspects that seem valid and relevant.<sup>97</sup>

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Christian theory, some of Christianity's critics tend to see only the shadow side, especially of Christian praxis. For all its perceptive insights into Christian theory and praxis, J. Kahl's *Das Elend des Christentums* is almost a total condemnation of Christianity. He says, "The New Testament is a manifesto of inhumanity, a well-planned mass deception; it stupefies men instead of enlightening them about their real interests" – op. cit., 19. Here, Ernst Bloch is closer to the truth when he says that the Bible contains much emancipatory potential together with enslaving features – Cf. *Atheismus im Christentum, Zur Religion des Exodus und des Reichs*, Gesamtausgabe, XIV, Frankfurt a. M., 1968, 53–54.

96. This reminds us of the abstractness which Marx criticized in the Young Hegelians. – Cf. *Deutsche Ideologie*, 43 ff.

97. This is not something unique to Christian theology. S. Radhakrishnan's works exemplify a similar approach with similar results. Apologetically motivated as he is, Radhakrishnan constructs an *abstract* and *idealized* picture of Hinduism, by conveniently dismissing or minimizing the less comfortable aspects of its belief and life and by selectively appropriating and reinterpreting those aspects that seem valuable. It is in this way that he manages to defend the caste system as a "democracy so far as spiritual values are concerned". (Cf. *The Hindu View of Life*, London, 171971 (11927)83.) "Economically we are a cooperative concern or brotherhood where we give according to our capacity and take according to our needs. Politically we enjoy equal rights



## 1. Abstract and undialectical

What strikes one in systematic treatises of Christian theology is the fact that it gives comparatively little attention to the concrete realizations of a faith that is professedly life-transforming or praxis-oriented. The theological discipline, Church history, concerns itself with the practical realization of Christian belief. But to take little or insufficient notice of the matter in the systematic treatment of Christianity or any of its fundamental aspects would be to construct a theory of Christianity on the basis of its theory or belief abstracted from its praxis or life dimension. Such theories would formulate what Christianity believes or claims to be without regard to what it is in reality or to whether and how its self-awareness and claims are justifiable in terms of its performance. Rahner's treatment of what Christianity is "as seen from outside" by an exposition of what Christianity "considers itself" or "understands itself" to be (c 1104-1108) is not untypical, though this may happen more covertly in other theologians. Though historicity is a constituent of Christianity, it is significant that Rahner treats Christian history in a separate section (c 1111-1114) after settling its essential characteristics as seen "from outside" and "from inside". In the short space available mention is made of factors like charism, martyrdom, the canonization of saints, evangelical counsels, service of the poor, and resistance to the divinization of the world. The less flattering aspects of Christian practice - antisemitism, dogmatic

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in the sight of law, and these two enable us to attain true spiritual freedom" (ibid). Except for a general confession of the evils of the caste system, Radhakrishnan forgets the inhumanity and misery caste meant to millions of the India's masses, enabling the upper classes, especially the priests and princes, to exploit the working classes. Even a casual reading of the Dharmaśāstras - cf. Manusmṛiti - would reveal the theoretical bases of the oppression and exploitation perpetrated in the name of *dharma*. In fact, the theoretical roots of the caste reach back to the Upaniṣads and beyond - Cf. Bhagavad-Gita 4:13,2:30; Chāndogya Upaniṣad, 5:10:7; Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, 1:4:11-13, Ṛgveda, 10:90:12 There are also scriptural passages that relativise the system - Cf. Vajrasūcika Upaniṣad. Cf. also footnote 127 below.



intolerance, the Inquisition, witch hunts, the Crusades, the anti-sexual bias, siding with the rich and powerful - receive no mention except for a general confession of the sinfulness and failure of the men who constitute the Church. A later article of Rahner's gives a long list of the mistakes and failures of the Church, including those of Church authority, but it remains a list, and is no analysis or study of the facts which are summarily dismissed as due to man's sinfulness and inadequacy.<sup>98</sup> Hans Küng devotes a dozen pages of his nearly 700 page work, *Christ sein*, to the negative aspects of Christian praxis, but this is again more a catalogue than an analysis of facts. Similarly, both Moltmann and Pannenberg content themselves with brief references to certain facts of history, either by way of claiming them as due to Christian influence or dismissing them as unchristian. The picture which these theologies give of Christianity is largely *abstract* and *unhistorical*. It is based on what Christianity believes or claims to be rather than what it has been and is in reality. Of course, Christianity is not merely its past or present realizations, and theology has to be concerned above all with what Christianity can and should be. But as we shall see, it is necessary to distinguish the ideal or the possible from Christianity's past and present reality, the theological imperative from the theological affirmative. Besides, the envisaged possibility or ideal is not so independent of the past and present reality that theology can simply abstract from it in its endeavour to construct a futuristic, praxis-oriented vision of Christianity. It is a paradox that for all its emphasis on the historicity of Christianity, theology does not pay sufficient attention to actual sociological or historical data in investigating the meaning of Christianity and in examining the truth and validity of its vision of man and reality. Had attention been given to the reality of Christian praxis, and not merely to Christian claims, it is doubtful if theologians would call Christianity the "pure expression of the essence of religion" (Rahner, C 1104) or the "truly radical humanism" (Küng, Cs 594) without any qualification.

Theology's treatment of the meaning of Christianity seems to suffer not only from its abstract and largely unhistorical

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98. SchTh, V, 24 ff.



procedure but also from an *undialectical* approach to the problem of belief and life. There is, first of all, the natural tendency to repress the negative aspects of Christian practice, which are in no way flattering.<sup>99</sup> These are dismissed without ado as “unchristian”, as the “antichristian turns of a post-christian history” (OG 106), and are accounted for in terms of man’s deviation from, or infidelity to, the Christian message. Rahner speaks, for instance, of the sinfulness and inadequacy, finitude and shortsightedness not only of ordinary Christians but also of Church authorities, which disfigure the true countenance of Christianity, though to unbiased observer the Church is still the sign of God’s holiness raised above the nations<sup>100</sup>. Küng contends that the mistakes and failures of Christianity are “beyond doubt a direct contradiction to the Christian programme, to Jesus of Nazareth” (Cs 38). The sharpest criticism of the Church comes not from numerous historical, philosophical, psychological or sociological objections but from the Gospel of Jesus Christ himself” (Cs 50 7). The oppressive totalitarian practices of the Communist countries are traced back to Marx himself, whereas the inhumanity of Christian practices is a deviation from the Christian programme (Cs 38 ff, 507). The reason is the all too human character of the Church, the ambivalence of the Church herself (Cs 507). Often enough other religions or philosophies are held responsible – not always wrongly, to be sure – for the misery of Christian practice. Moltmann sees the levelling of the original eschatological orientation of Christian belief and the loss of its critical power in the impact of Greek thought with its eternally present immutable God (ThH 35). Hence the call to a *return to the sources*, which did have a liberating influence on contemporary theology in some respects. For “this has helped to call into question certain unhealthy developments in Christian life and thought as unbiblical, as due to alien influences, as Hellenistic, Manichaean or Scholastic rather than really “Christian”. There is also a measure of truth in the

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99. The psychological grounds of this partly conscious and partly unconscious process cannot be entered into here. Cf. Freud’s study of defence mechanisms and repression: *Zur Aetiologie der Hysterie* (1896), Collected works, I, London, 1940, 423–459; *Über Hemmung, Symptom und Angst*, Collected Works, XIV, 196.

100. Cf. SchTh, V, 24 ff.



theory that attributes the less comfortable facts of Christian history to human weakness or egoism, or more generally to the ambivalence of history. However, the argument is too general and undifferentiated to have much explicative value. Besides, it would create the impression that Christian belief is something that exists in itself independently of its historical mediations. But the fact is that the Christian message reaches the believer as mediated through its historical realizations through the Churches, their traditions, through the beliefs and practices of Christians down the centuries to our own day, and Christian theory is equally conditioned by the concrete life and thought situation and the practical concerns of Christians, especially of those in positions of authority. This is equally true of the biblical traditions. It would, therefore, be unhistorical to characterize the negative aspects of Christian praxis – or theory for that matter – as simply unchristian, as deviations from the original, real or essential Christian belief or programme. Given the composite character of the biblical traditions, to mention only one of the important sources of Christian belief, and in view of the dialectics of theory and praxis, it has to be *shown* that a less comfortable fact of Christian praxis is nothing but a deviation from the biblical or Christian message, and not simply *asserted*.

A detailed examination would be required of various factors, both practical and theoretical, that might have played a role in the process. It goes without saying that this should include rather than exclude, as it often happens, Biblical traditions. Such a study is likely to reveal that the roots of some of the malpractices that theology criticizes as “unchristian” go farther back into the history of Christianity and Israel than is normally realized or admitted. Most theological theories of Christianity and Christian faith, including those considered earlier leave much to be desired in this respect. Our previous section was an attempt, incomplete and tentative, to show that some of the less humanizing, reconciling and liberating features of Christian practice have their origin, at least partly, in Biblical traditions. These contain, along with basically emancipatory, humanizing and reconciling impulses and ideals, views and norms that betray a good deal of doctrinal intolerance and anti-sexual bias. There is a tendency to legitimize the existing structures and states of affairs as natural and God-given without considering the inhumanity and



unfreedom they might imply. Some of the less human and more oppressive practices of Christianity derive, at least partly, from such Biblical views and norms, as is shown by the reference Christian theologians make to such ideas and ideals in the Bible and the support Church authorities seek therefrom for their teaching and conduct. Of course, more research has to be done to show how and to what extent a particular Biblical ideal or doctrine was alive in the minds of Christians, both ordinary believers and Churchmen, influencing their thought and action. In view of the fact that the Bible contains views and ideals that contradict, neutralize or relativize one another and that these have been corroborated or challenged by alien ideas and practical interests, it would, of course, be difficult to determine the precise nature and extent of the Biblical basis of the negative facts of Christian life and practice. This is equally true of the more positive aspects of Christian history and life, and even in this respect there is a theory deficit in theology. Not that theology is oblivious of Christianity's positive contribution to man's growth and development. In fact, theologians are inclined to lay claim to all that is good and true in human life, especially in the Western world, as due to Christian influence.<sup>101</sup> This is done by referring to some Biblical doctrine or other without an effort to show that this was not neutralized by contrary Biblical traditions and that it has been alive in Christian consciousness as an influence on Christian practice. Following Gogarten, most contemporary theologians would claim that secularization was a "necessary and legitimate consequence of Christian faith," though it has not been long since the Christian Churches began taking a positive view of the latter.<sup>102</sup> The monotheistic dedivinizing of nature and

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101. Cf. H. Cox, *The Secular City*, London, 1968 (<sup>1</sup>1965), 31: "The rise of natural science, of democratic political institutions, and of cultural pluralism - all developments we normally associate with Western culture - can scarcely be understood without the original impetus of the Bible".

102. F. Gogarten, *Der Mensch zwischen Gott und Welt*, Heidelberg, 1952; *Verhängnis und Hoffnung der Neuzeit; Die Säkularisierung als theologisches Problem*, Stuttgart, 1953, Gogarten's view seems equally to hang on a questionable concept of God. See below "Questionable Assumptions" towards the end of this section.



the two-kingdom doctrine of the Reformation are adduced as decisive factors that made the idea of a "worldly", autonomous world possible. Little is done, however, to give evidence that these doctrines did actually lead to the origin and development of the secular idea. The question here is not whether some of the biblical ideas and ideals can legitimize secularisation, but whether these did inspire or influence the secularization process or whether Israel's "theocratic" view of history had rather a neutralizing impact on the ideals that led to secularization. It is one thing to show something as good and acceptable— theology may do it, and it may do it with the help of Biblical texts, if there are any that help—; it is another thing to claim that something is on that account a consequence of Christian faith. This would be unhistorical. Theology seems to be a victim to this fallacy. As a result, the picture it draws of Christianity and of the fundamental aspects of Christian belief remains largely undialectical. Whatever be the psychological motivations behind this procedure—whether it be self-assurance or self-assertion—, one thing seems only too clear: a certain "original" or "real" core of Christian belief is exempted, in effect, from the process of history and the theory-praxis dialectics, as if the "original" or "essential" Christian message would be free of all ambivalence and perfect in every way. This is not only undefensible in view of the mutually bound and mutually conditioning nature of theory (belief) and praxis (life) but also dangerous. It would *immunize* the "original" or "essential" Christian message against further scrutiny and criticism and foster the naive belief that a complete acceptance of all that is in the Bible or in the "real" or "essential" core of it is the remedy for all evils. This makes theology's retreat to an "essential" or "original" Christianity questionable and gives it an *ideological* character.

## 2 The retreat to the essential

The theologians considered in section II are in a way as much one-sided as they are abstract, for they not only abstract from the practical realization of Christianity but also fail to thematize the *whole* Christian theory. This is due to a more or less conscious process of selection and reinterpretation. It is true that any investigation of reality has to be, to a certain extent, selective and interpretative whether on account of the investigator's



background and interests or owing to the specific nature of the inquiry. The selection and interpretation that lead to a one-sided picture of Christianity seem to be of another order, and may be called *selective appropriation* and *retrojective interpretation* respectively.

*Selective Appropriation:* It is significant that the theologians give little or no attention to the less positive views and norms of the Biblical tradition that seem to have favoured the oppressive, dehumanizing practices of Christian history regarding social justice, sexuality and religious freedom. In fact, the positive and rather inviting image of Christianity in the writings of Moltmann, Pannenberg, Rahner and Küng results from a *selective appropriation* of Biblical ideas and ideals. Moltmann's definition of the God of the Bible as the God of Exodus and the future would give the impression that that is all that the Bible has to say of God. The fact is that the God of the Bible is as much a God who was and is and as who will be. Both the Old and New Testaments speak of God as the God of creation (Is 40:27-31; 44:24b-28; Job 38-41; Ps 8; 104; Lk 12:22-31; Rom 1:18-21). The story of human origins, paradise and the Fall are Biblical, and as such not inventions of Christianity in the "religious epoch" of its history.<sup>103</sup> Bonhoeffer's conception of a "religionless" Christianity may seem attractive to a short-sighted apologetics, but that would not make the original Christianity any the less religious or cultic, as Israel, the "Church" of the OT, was a religious and cultic community.<sup>104</sup> Christian belief implies actually a looking backward - Moltmann himself admits it in the case of the Cross and of the Resurrection of Jesus - as well as a hopeful looking forward. Pannenberg's conception of an indirect revelation of God through the events of history rather than through direct self-manifestations makes

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103. C. J. Moltmann's *Umkehr zur Zukunft*, 114. What it criticized is not so much Moltmann's emphasis on the future - which is sometimes one-sided - but his basing it on the Bible, quietly dismissing passages that do not fit in with his conception.

104. Cf. S. Mowinkel, "Gottesdienst II: Im AT", in RGG, II, 1752-1756; H. Riesenfeld, "Gottesdienst IV: Im NT", *ibid.*, 1761 - 1762.



better sense than suprahistorical theophany or word revelation, but it can be presented as the Biblical view of revelation only by minimizing the importance of theophanies in the Bible (Gen 18: 1ff; 21: 17; 1 Kgs 19: 13 Ex 33). In fact, some of the instances of "indirect" revelation, the promise and judgement events, for instance, are in the medium of theophany revelation (Ex 33: Is 6: 1 H; Jer 24: 3 H). However, it should be said, to Pannenberg's credit, that his treatment is in general more discerning and critical than Moltmann's. Coming to Küng, his positive portrayal of Christianity as a unique, absolute and radically humanizing religion in comparison with others is based on an extremely selective treatment of the Christian traditions. Küng reduces Christianity to a point – the person of Jesus – and then fills it with selected contents, leaving aside practically the whole of the OT tradition except where he speaks of the God of Jesus who was also the God of Israel.

*Retrojective Interpretation:* The "idealised" picture of Christianity is as much due to a *retrojective interpretation* of the select views and ideals of Biblical tradition. This is especially the case with Moltmann's interpretation of Christianity as a disturbing factor in human society in that the hope for God's promised reign makes Christians discontent with the existing state of affairs and the Cross becomes the radical criticism of human structures and practices. This impels Christians to work for the transformation of the social, political and psychological mechanisms of unfreedom and stagnation and to move beyond them towards a future of greater justice, peace and brotherhood. It is true that Jesus' interpretation of love for one's neighbour as concrete help given to one's needy fellow-man, or the doctrine of justification, may become revolutionizing when applied to oppressive, dehumanizing structures in society. But this demands an awareness of the role of social and political structures in liberation as well as oppression, an awareness that has been brought about above all since and through the work of Marx. This is something really new and whatever be Marx's indebtedness to the Biblical traditions, the Marxian call to the overthrow of structures of oppression and exploitation, especially in the socio-economic order, cannot be reduced to the Biblical criticism of social injustices. Therefore, to speak of the Cross or of the Biblical message of hope as emancipatory and world-changing in the



modern sense would be unhistorical. It would be to read one's own ideas into the Biblical message, a procedure which Moltmann himself criticizes in a different context (Th H 32). The fact is that the Bible thought of justice and love in the context of the existing structures, and did not speak of changing them. The eschatological hope was not a call to *change* this world, but to wait for God's reign which is essentially God's work. This is why neither Jesus nor Paul drew the conclusions arrived at by Moltmann. The Gospels narrate, as we have seen, how Jesus recommended the payment of tax to a colonialist regime, without caring in the least about its oppressive character. At another time, he is said to have turned down a request to intervene in a dispute concerning inheritance. We have already referred to Paul's legitimizing all civil authority as divinely instituted without raising the question whether it was a just authority or not. It would, therefore, be native to believe that wherever the Bible is read, the Church will be called to revolutionary activity. Rahner, Küng and Pannenberg are more reserved and cautious in this matter than Moltmann, though Küng calls for a theology of "great spiritual depth and evangelic immediacy" for Latin America (Cs 555), as if the Gospels contained all that a liberation theology, rightly or wrongly, demands in the name of the Gospel.

*The return to the Essential and the Original:* This is not to deny Christianity the right to discard those aspects or elements of its traditional belief that it now recognizes as not true or relevant and to develop and emphasize those ideals and impulses in its belief that it considers important today. Christianity and theology have as much right to self-criticism, renewal and development as any historical reality. What is to be criticized is not, therefore, theology's selectivity and interpretation, but the motivation, modality and consequences of what we termed selective appropriation and retrojective interpretation. Contemporary theology discards, for example, Biblical ideas and norms which are now recognized as not true or valid as *historically conditioned*. We may not object to this appellation; we may very well speak of something *especially* bound up with and conditioned by the circumstances of a time as historically conditioned. But objection has to be raised against using the term to avoid criticizing



something wrong or harmful. For example, it would be too mild a judgment to dismiss Paul's devaluation of sex and marriage in 1 Cor 7 as a historically conditioned view; it would create the impression that Paul's view of sex was all right at that time.<sup>105</sup> It was not. It may be that we understand how he could think so, considering his life-situation and the background of his thought. Nor can it be said, as the term historically conditioned would suggest, that Paul's view of the matter is on the whole good and valid, requiring nothing other than a slight accommodation or reformulation. Theology does not seem to be conscious of the ambiguity of the term "historically conditioned" and the apologetic and ideological use to which it can be put. This will be clear if we compare the use of the term in the previous case with its application to the Gen. 1:28 injunction to "increase and multiply". This is historically conditioned in another sense: It was something legitimate and even necessary at that time when the rate of mortality was high, and maximum fertility was a desideratum for the survival of mankind. Similarly, the concept of *doctrinal development*, in itself a defensible theoretical construct, could serve to cover the modification or correction of a belief or doctrine. This seems to be the case with the use of the term to denote the change that has now come about, with the acceptance of the salvific value of other religions.<sup>106</sup> The new attitude means, in reality, a break from the old belief expressed in the dictum going back to Origen and Cyprian: "Extra ecclesiam nulla salus." The concept is liable to apologetic or ideological uses in another way. Jesus' commandment of love and the Gospel criticism of the religious elite of the time may legitimately be developed into a criticism of inhuman structures and a demand for change at the macro-level of society. But to retroject this upon the Gospel or the whole Biblical tradition and to call it revolutionary and emancipatory in a modern post-Marxist sense would not only falsify history but also lend itself to ideological, system-stabilising uses. For one could then defend the "original" or "essential" Christian message as something humanizing with

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105. C. Schnackenburg, loc. cit., 24, 26.

106. For an analysis and evaluation of this change after Vatican II, cf. K. Kunnumpuram, *Ways of Salvation*, Ranchi, 1971.



the help of the conceptual apparatus provided by the retrojective interpretation, without criticizing the less humanizing and emancipatory aspects of the Christian message or developing the humanizing and liberating impulses in such a way that these include social and structural changes. *This makes the retrojectively selective and interpretative retreat to the essential meaning of Christian faith and Christianity a questionable undertaking. The tactical, apologetic or applicational interests that seem to motivate this return to the sources make it at the same a flight from the unpalatable aspects of Christian belief and life. It becomes an evasion of the problem of Christianity rather than a facing of it.*

*The Knowledge-governing Interests of Theology:* Theologians are not entirely unaware of theology's retrojectively selective and interpretative procedure. Referring to the retention of the formula, "Extra ecclesiam nulla salus" while changing its sense by reinterpretation, Küng says that this was all that was tolerated in Catholic theology before Vatican II.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, by a *tactical* appeal to the "original" or "essential" meaning of Christianity, Catholic theologians have been able to propose views which would otherwise have been suppressed by the magisterium. Of course, this is possible only to a limited extent as the magisterium is to determine how the Bible is to be understood. More dangerous than this are the *apologetic* motives that guide theology's selectivity and reinterpretation of views and ideals of the Biblical (and post-Biblical) traditions that are claimed to make up the "essential" or "original" Christian message. Küng's *Christ sein* is a classical example of a refined and subtle apologetics typical of Western theology today. To be sure, compared to Barth, Bonhoeffer or Kraemer, Küng is less one-sided in his criticism of world religions. But his comparison of the theory and praxis of other religions with the Christian programme, which he reduces to the person of Jesus, is designed to make them appear in a less favourable light (Cs passim, sp. 81-108). It serves to demonstrate Christianity's uniqueness and absolute validity. Thus, the emphasis on the real differences between religions amounts to an exhibition of Christian superiority: "There are essential differences between the terrifying idols of the wonderful god's

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107. *Wahrhaftigkeit, Zur Zukunft der Kirche*, Freiburg, 1969, 188.



island of Bali and an icon wall of Orthodox saints of Sagorsec, between sacred temple prostitution and the Christian consecration of virgins, between a religion whose symbol is the linga (phallus stone) reproduced a thousand times in the same temple and religion whose symbol is the cross, between a religion of holy wars against the enemies and a religion of programmatic love for the enemy, between a religion of human sacrifice... and a religion of day to day self-sacrifice for men" (Cs 94). More dangerous than the self-praise implied in these words is Küng's characterization of the malpractices of other religions and humanisms as constitutive of their programmes, whereas the negative aspects of Christianity are nothing but deviations from or contradictions of the real Christian message: "Even the atrocities of the Spanish conquistadors and the Roman burning of heretics - simply not in accordance with but against the Christian programme, not Christian, but undoubtedly unchristian! - does not level these differences" (ibid). Similarly, the failure of Marxism is, at least partly, a consequence of Marxian theory: the Marxist dictatorship and violence are not in contradiction with the *Communist Manifesto* and Marx (Cs. 31 ff.). But not so with the atrocities of Christian history: "they contradict indisputably and directly the Christian programme, Jesus of Nazareth" (Cs 38). Here, Küng forgets that the Bible which he also takes as normative and which he wants to be accepted without expurgations (Cs 457 ff) knows bloodshed and violence; in fact, the holy war is not exclusively an Islamic phenomenon; it is found in the OT (Ex. 15: 3; Dt 130; Jo 10: 14 ff; Judg 5: 11, 13, 6: 34 ff; 1 Sam 21: 6).<sup>108</sup> Only a selective presentation of the Christian message discarding large parts of the Bible, not to speak of later doctrines and practices, would allow such unqualified claims on behalf of the Christian programme. Further, it is somewhat naive to assume that recourse to a person rather than to a principle, doctrine or myth as the absolute norm of one's belief and life would automatically rule out misinterpretation or misuse, as Küng seems to think. A closer look into Christian history and the search for the theoretical bases of the malpractices in Christian doctrines should have helped Küng to realize that the

108. G. V. Rad, *Der heilige Krieg im alten Israel*, Göttingen, 1958 (1951).



Christian programme is not so clear and definite as to make the failures and mistakes of Christian practice nothing but deviations from, or violations of, the Christian programme. In this respect, Kung seems to have a view of knowledge that is basically pre-critical and undialectical. He appears to be oblivious of the knowledge-conditioning and knowledge - conditioned nature of human life and action. Though Pannenberg is not free from apologetic orientation, his theology cannot be said to be so one-sided as Kung's or Moltmann's. In view of the fact that he sees the Biblical message as doubly problematic, as regards our understanding of what it really means and as regards its truth value, his selective procedure cannot be criticized as much as as those of others. However, even Pannenberg does not admit clearly the selective and interpretative nature of what he presents as the real Christian message; it is presented in such a way as to make the impression that it is true and valid merely by its being Biblical. When we come to Moltmann, however, the motive force of his thought is the practical relevance of the Christian message. Moltmann is concerned with the humanization and liberation of man and society and sees in Christianity a powerful force of revolutionary change. In his prophetic fervour, Moltmann bypasses those aspects of the Biblical tradition that contradict his view and presents those ideas and ideals that seem to be humanizing and liberating as the *Biblical* or Christian message. This makes his otherwise fascinating reflections a one-sided and unrealistic view of Christian reality. The conservatives who see in modern theology a sell-out of the Christian faith are not entirely wrong when judged by Biblical ideas and norms alone. The more dogmatic, authoritarian and system-stabilizing interpretations of Christianity may be Biblically justified, if one takes a static approach to Biblical traditions, selectively appropriate those ideas and norms that fit in with a conservative outlook, and discards the more emancipatory and humanizing perspectives. A theology that wants to make the Christian message a liberating and humanizing force that would answer the legitimate hopes and aspirations of contemporary humanity cannot be effective if it bypasses the opposite views proclaimed in the name of Christianity. It should rather confront such views openly and without claiming to possess the whole truth infallibly. It should examine whether and how far they belong to the original - the Biblical - traditions of Christianity and show why they can no longer be proclaimed as



true and valid. Only a realistic approach of this kind that does not pick and choose from the Bible (or other Christian traditions), but consider the Christian message as a whole including those aspects which it considers no longer valid or tenable, can hope to do justice to the whole reality of 'Christianity' and be a really effective interpretation and updating that is not liable to ideological misuse.

### 3. Questionable assumptions

There are certain fundamental assumptions that seem at least partly responsible for the questionable procedure criticized above. For instance, the extension of the concept of history so as to include Jesus' resurrection as a real historical event is in effect introducing the category of the suprahistorical which Moltmann and Pannenberg would categorically disavow. It remains to be shown how history can accommodate something which is nothing less than the anticipated fulfilment of history and still be history in the usual sense. Equally problematic is the treatment of the problem of God in Moltmann, Pannenberg and Rahner, not to speak of Küng's eclectic and less original views. Moltmann has seen rightly the basic similarity of the proofs of God from the world, from human existence and universal history. He sees their problematic nature and is not inclined to accord them any rational validity (ThH 255, 259-260). Can Moltmann then justify his belief in the promising God? For his whole theology of hope is based on God's promise and its fulfilment. Sometimes Moltmann speaks as if God reveals himself directly in his promises, in the cross and resurrection (ThH 104 ff 250-260). It would seem that God can be known from these events in a direct and unquestionable manner. This brings Moltmann into the neighbourhood of Barth's claim that God is known only through his word. On the other hand, Moltmann contends that God proves himself in the resurrection of the crucified Jesus and the hope grounded in it. The further assertion that we cannot live or act without this hope gives this argument the character of a proof of God. And this is not fundamentally different from the cosmological, anthropological or historical proofs except that it bases itself on a particular event that is itself problematic and needs to be proved, and is not exactly the case with the reality of the world,



human existence or history. Again, Moltmann seems to forget that a coming God, a God of the future, is in no way more intelligible or less figurative (symbolic) than the God who was and who is. From the point of view of knowledge theory of language criticism, they are not essentially different. Whether the coming God is a better image, less liable to ideological interpretation, than the creator God or the omnipotent God is another question. But this would depend more on our understanding of the images than on the images themselves. True, the Creator God has often been called upon to bless and legitimize existing structures that were inhuman and that needed change, but we should not forget that creation accounts were put to positive, emancipatory uses as well (as for instance in the defense of the body against Manichaeism and in the peasants' protest against oppressive socio-economic structures in the 16th century).

Pannenberg sees the whole problem in a broader perspective; he gives some value even to traditional proofs, especially those of Greek philosophy. Pannenberg is right in claiming that to be the only God of all, God must be the God of history, as the world is not the static cosmos of Greek thought, but an ever-changing and developing history. However, it is not so obvious that history needs a unifying factor to be a unity and that this is a personal God, the God of Jesus and the God of Israel. Pannenberg's emphasis that our knowledge of God is indirect and not direct as in the case of empirical things, is enlightening and can relativize dogmatic claims to a direct knowledge of God. But from the point of modern language philosophy, it is necessary to differentiate God-talk from object-talk much more than Pannenberg does. This lack of critical differentiation appears more strikingly in Rahner. Rahner stresses that God is absolutely mystery, ineffable and incomprehensible, but speaks in the same breath of the unique, absolutely certain and unsurpassable revelation of this mystery in Jesus Christ and Christianity and that as triune in itself.<sup>109</sup> The mystery of which we may have an inkling in our experience cannot be expressed by such literalist, dogmatic language if it is, as Rahner says, the absolute, ineffable mystery. We need to be more conscious of the limits

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109. SdTh, V, 15, 20; C 1107.



and risks of God-talk, which is more a figurative, poetic or "mythical" expression of our experience or apprehension of the meaning of life and reality than a literally objective expression like "rain" or a statement like "It rains outside." This should make us wary of identifying God with a particular reality or a state of affairs or a task, though we have to relate God-talk to the life-and-experience context in which it has its origin and in the light of which we have to pose the question of its meaning, truth and relevance. This alone might help us to be on guard against the permanent danger of absolutising and thus particularising God and making God-talk either irrelevant or harmful. It is interesting to observe how Rahner sees the docetic view of Christ as a *mythical* statement and the real Chalcedonian dogma as a realistic one.<sup>110</sup> Rahner seems to take the statement "Jesus Christ is really God and man" as a literal ordinary statement like "Einstein was a German-born Jew" and the statement "Jesus is God in human form" as a mythical one. However, from the point of view of knowledge theory and language criticism, the difference between the two is not that the one is literal and the other non-literal or figurative, but that the one affirms the reality and the real unity of the humanity and divinity in Jesus, whereas the other takes at least one of the terms and the unity between them as apparent rather than real.

## V. Understanding the Dialectics of Belief and Life

Can theology avoid being abstract and arbitrarily selective in its investigation of the meaning and truth of Christianity? Can it manage without retrojective interpretation and updating? There are factors of a theoretical and practical nature that militate against such a change. We may mention, for example, the irrational, decisionistic understanding of Christian belief, the authority-bound adherence to doctrines and norms of conduct, and the interest of Church authority in theological conformism. Nevertheless, there are signs of a change in the direction of a more critical and scientific theology. As we saw, Moltmann's theology is an impressive attempt to interpret Christianity as the dynamism of hope, critical of existing structures and requiring

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110. Ibid., I, 176-177; V, 20-21; IV, 152.



a revolutionary praxis. This is true of political theology (Metz), ideology criticism (Herrmann) and the theologies of liberation (Gutierrez, Assmann) and revolution (Schaul).<sup>111</sup> These theologies, however, do not reflect sufficiently on the dialectical relationship of praxis with theory and vice versa.<sup>112</sup> Further, they seem to consider a certain core of Christian message as immune to the criticism they make of "post-Biblical", or "nonessential" Christianity. Pannenberg's call to treat theological statements as hypotheses whose truth requires some sort of confirmation envisages a more scientific theology, which can in a way be more liberating than a one-sided praxis orientation. But the praxis dimension of Christianity does not receive adequate attention in his writings, though he is no way unaware of the problem (WTh 426 ff; 436 ff). Indeed, one might get the impression that Christian belief is above all concerned with the explanation and clarification of reality and not so much with living and acting with it (WTh 347, 367-368). There are also attempts to thematize the theory-praxis dialectics either from the point of view of pastoral theology (Greinacher, Heinrich) or from that of theology as a whole (Herrmann, Janowsky, Schupp).<sup>113</sup> These are no doubt significant

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111. Metz, op. cit.; Gremmels-Herrmann, op. cit.; Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, New York, 1973; R. Radford Ruether, *Liberation Theology, Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American power*, New York, 1972; R. Schaul, "Revolutionary Change" in *Theological Perspective*, in C. Bennet (ed.), *Christian Ethics in a Changing World*; T. Rendtorff-H. E. Tödt, *Theologie der Revolution, Analysen und Materialien*, Frankfurt a. M., 1970 (1968).

113. N. Greinacher, "Das Theorie-Praxis-Problem in der Praktischen Theologie", in F. Klostermann-R. Zerfass (ed.), *Praktische Theologie heute*, Munich, 1974, 11ff.; J. Heinrich, "Theorie welcher Praxis? Theorie-Praxis-Vermittlung als Grundaufgabe Praktischer Theologie", in Bertsch, op. cit., 9-85; F. Mennekes, "Praktische Theologie - Theorie wirklichkeitsorientierter Praxis", *ibid.*, 86-148; H. N. Janowski, "Theologie als kritisch orientierender Wissenschaft", in *Theologie und Soziologie*, Stuttgart, 1970, 50-92; F. Schupp, *Auf dem Weg zu einer kritischen Theologie*, Freiburg, 1974, sp. 60-69; 111-117.



developments and may lead to a more adequate theorizing of Christian theory and praxis. The beginnings betray, however, a somewhat selective and retrojective procedure, which is not quite consistent with the professed critical intent. The theory-praxis dialectics outlined by Hasenhüttl<sup>114</sup> would require theology to develop a more open and critical approach to do justice to the theme.

### 1. The need for a new orientation in Theology

Our criticism of the understanding of Christianity in the writings of Rahner, Küng, Moltmann and Pannenberg as being abstract, arbitrarily selective and interpretative implied an alternative conception of theology that would investigate the *whole* of Christian belief and life in their *dialectical* relationship. Here, belief is not to be taken as an unquestionable premise or presupposition of theology, as Rahner's or Heinrich Ott's conception of theology as the science of faith would advocate.<sup>115</sup> Belief, no matter how convinced the believer may be of truth and validity, is for theology something *problematic* in the full sense of the word: a fact and a claim whose truth, meaning and relevance theology has to investigate. Of course, belief can be something deeply personal and thus incapable of an exhaustive or fully adequate objectification or formulation. Nevertheless, faith is intersubjectively communicable, and theology concerns itself with it in as much as it can be known through its linguistic or other objectifications. Theology has, therefore, to consider Christian belief as it has found its expression in the doctrines and practices of Christianity, both Biblical and post-Biblical. What these reveal of Christianity is in no wise uniform, and there is sense in speaking of Christian beliefs and doctrines rather than Christian

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114. Cf. the preceding article in this issue of *Jeevadhara*. Cf. also Hasenhüttl, "Erfahrung als Ort der Theologie", in Klostermann - Zerfaß (eds), op. cit., 628-637.

115. Cf. Rahner, "Theologie", in HThTI, VII, 238-240; H. Ott, "Theologie als Gebet und als Wissenschaft", in *Theologische Zeitschrift*, 1958, 120-132. Ott goes a step further than Rahner in that he grounds theology in the experience of prayer and contends that theology as our "speaking of God" is possible only as our "speaking to God".



belief and doctrine. Similarly, what we call Christian practice is a complex of different practical realizations of Christian beliefs, individually and collectively. This pluralism in belief and life makes the theorization of Christianity extremely difficult. But this is more or less true of many other, if not all, cases grouped under the same term, and we cannot avoid a measure of simplification except at the cost of total theoretical abstinence.<sup>116</sup> Therefore, theology will have to ask and ascertain what Christianity is and *claims to be*, what it proposes as God's will and man's fulfilment, and whether and how the Christian claim has been realized in the life and activity of Christians.<sup>117</sup> For a religion that understands its message as something that transforms the life of man and society already here and now it is necessary to ask whether this self-awareness is justified by its past and present life. If the claim is not fully realized, or not realized, at all one has to ask why this is so: whether it is all due to human weakness and perversity or to alien influences. The fact that theory and praxis depend upon and condition one another and constitute an ongoing dialectics of knowledge (belief, conviction, theory) and action (life, behaviour, praxis) makes the consideration of Christianity as the dialectics of belief (doctrine) and life (practice) all the more urgent. Needless to say that this will have to extend to all fundamental aspects of Christian theory and praxis, both positive and negative. As no part of belief or life is exempt from the theory-praxis dialectics, it is necessary that we take the various elements or aspects of Christian theory and praxis as open to examination and requiring some sort of "confirmation" of their truth and relevance. *To be a truly scientific investigation of the meaning, truth and relevance of Christianity,*<sup>118</sup> *theology has to be a theory of the dialectics of belief and life,*

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116. Cf. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Oxford, <sup>3</sup>1968 (<sup>1</sup>1958), nn. 65-67.

117. That Theology is not thereby reduced to Church history will become clear in the course of the article.

118. This is not opposed to Pannenberg's proposal to develop theology as the "science of God" or as "religious science" - Cf. WTh 255-266, 303-329. For one thing, theology does not, in our view, start from absolute, unquestionable premises but must pose the question of the truth and relevance of its premises and try



and not merely a "science of belief" (Rahner) or a "theory of historical praxis" (Moltmann).

What are offered here are tentative suggestions about the shape a critically scientific theology would have to take. To be sure, this will imply various steps or stages of investigation, all dependent on and conditioning one another as moments of one and the same research process. We may distinguish the following moments or aspects.

### Understanding

The first requirement of theology is to understand what Christianity in reality means. This is not as unproblematic as it would appear at first, as Christianity is a complex reality with a history reaching back to Jesus and beyond him to the history of Israel and its neighbours. There is first of all the trans-historical gap that separates the thought and mentality of those born and brought up in a Christian milieu from the thought patterns of the Biblical tradition. There is then the trans-cultural gap that divides, for instance, the Bantu way of life and thought from the Christian traditions of the Western world. This means a bridging of different thought and life patterns, an interpretation that makes this bridging possible along with a proper understanding of the different traditions. We may call this *hermeneutics*, provided we mean thereby the understanding not merely of Christian theory but also of Christian praxis, and this in their dialectical relationship with one another. The practical reality has to be accepted on the basis not merely of what Christianity says but of objectively ascertainable sociological or historical data. Hermeneutics will have, on the one hand, to investigate Christian beliefs and doctrines in terms of the life situation and practical interests that might have had a role to play in their origin and development; on the other hand, it should inquire into Christian life and praxis in terms of Christian beliefs and doctrines, in so far as these have been involved in the way

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to verify them. For another, the theory of Christianity-of Christian praxis and Christian theory-is to be developed in the context of other religions without claiming for its object any *a priori* superiority.



Christians have lived and acted. A comparatively more accessible and immediately relevant starting-point would be the reality of present day Christian theory and praxis. The intention of an empirical theology<sup>119</sup> would be in place here; this would free theology further from the excessively backward orientation of historico-critical theology at the expense of what Christianity is and does here and now. Consideration of the present reality of Christianity can, however, be only a moment of theological hermeneutics and is no alternative to historical studies. Christianity is a historical reality like any other religion and cannot be understood adequately except in terms of its historical origin and development. Besides, Christianity's origins documented by the Bible - in the case of the Catholic Church also some of the later developments - fulfil a normative function in its theory and practice. Theology has, therefore, to understand and clarify the dialectics of Christian doctrine and practice as they are ascertained by the history of theology and the history of Christianity. Similarly, both the OT and NT have to be analysed and understood in the historical context of their origin and development. The need to study other religions and ways of thinking and life has to be stressed. If Christianity originated, developed and had its existence not in a historical vacuum but in a larger religious and human context and in interaction with it, it is necessary to take this into account if only with a view to a more adequate understanding of Christianity. The historical study of Christianity's origin and development may have by itself a critical or emancipatory impact. It may demystify some of the Church teachings and practices by revealing their historically

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119. W. Hermann, "Mündigkeit Vernunft und die Theologie", in *Reform der theologischen Ausbildung*, Stuttgart, 1968, 52-75; Janowski, art. cit., 50-69. What S. Rayan says of an "Indian Christology" is relevant here: "It is plain that attention should be paid both to the past and to the present, but it is equally clear for a living Christology that pride of place be accorded to the present. The past is significant in so far as it affects and qualifies the present, lives within it, and holds insights which are valid for all time but which today perhaps lie neglected and submerged" - "An Indian Christology: a Discussion of Method", in *Jeevadhara* 3, 1971, 212.



conditioned nature, for it will be possible to criticise something that proves to be neither suprahuman nor timeless. Be that as it may, hermeneutics is as such concerned with the meaning of the Christian reality, and understanding what Christianity is, is not identical with knowing its truth and validity. Thus, hermeneutics cannot by itself constitute the whole of Christian theology, as a kerygmatic or "positive" conception of theology would contend.<sup>120</sup>

### Verification

Theology cannot evade the question of the truth of Christian belief except at the risk of being a collection of unsubstantiated claims. Christian doctrines need, therefore, to be examined in terms of their truth value. The truth of the Christian theory (of God, man and the world) and its saving power cannot be taken for granted, if belief is to be a rational, responsible and critical commitment, and not a blind acceptance of authority or an irrational, decisionistic engagement.<sup>121</sup> It is not enough to say that we cannot judge the word of God; we should rather submit to its judgement (Barth).<sup>122</sup> The question is whether what presents itself as God's word is this and in what sense it is so. The existence of scriptures claiming to be God's word does not even prove that there is a God. This is something that is problematic, something that requires to be shown to be rationally and responsibly acceptable, and not to be presupposed either as regards its reality or its nature. Neither faith nor God's word is an unquestionably obvious presupposition or premise on which theology can base itself. On the contrary, theology must show that its premise is something that

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120. Cf. H. Ott's exposition of kerygma and "kerygmatic theology" (Bultmann) in RGG, III, 1250 - 1254 and Pannenberg's critical remarks on "positive" theology (Barth) and hermeneutics (Bultmann, Ebeling) in WTh 266 ff., 278 ff., 351.

121. We may recall here the emphasis the First Vatican Council laid on the *reasonable* character of belief - Cf. Denzinger, n. 1790; Neuner-Ross, 36.

122. K. Barth, "Das Wort Gottes als Aufgabe der Theologie", in J. Motmann(ed.), *Anfänge der Dialektischen Theologie*, I, Munich, 1962, 197ff.



can be responsibly accepted by human reason. A world view, religion or ideology can recommend itself for acceptance on the basis of faith, and if faith is not required to be rational or critical, there is no reason why I should embrace Christianity – or any religion, for that matter – rather than a racial or fascist ideology. To say that faith proves itself in praxis and that theology does not need to give a theoretical account of it is equally inadequate. The claim that theology needs no inner-theoretical justification rests on a questionable understanding of faith as a direct “I-Thou relationship” between the believer and God. But this would be valid only on the basis of a pre-critical, literalist understanding of God-talk.<sup>123</sup> It forgets that Christian belief is not a contentless and ecstatic encounter, as an exaggerated personalism would conceive of it. Belief is, on the contrary, something socially and linguistically mediated, and its “object” is not a contentless point. In fact, to exempt a particular view or experience of the need for rational examination and confirmation is to immunize it and expose it to ideological misuse. The propositions of belief may not, therefore, be taken as absolutely true and valid in advance. They may be so for the believer but not for theology which has to investigate rather than presuppose their truth and validity. Belief statements should rather be viewed as problematic, hypothetical, and requiring some kind of *verification* or refutation.<sup>124</sup> Christian theory consists not merely of calls and responses or of performative propositions, which cannot by themselves be said to be true or false. The fact is that even these involve statements of an affirmative or negative kind that raise the question of truth or falsehood. To characterize Christian language as non-cognitive would be escapism, and a theology that intends to be

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123. J. Heinrich’s claim that theology does not need a theoretical foundation like Marxism or other scientific disciplines seems to base itself on such an understanding of God and faith. – Cf. loc. cit., 38 ff., 43.

124. Cf. Pannenberg’s excellent treatment of the problem in WTh 303–348.

The words “verification” and “refutation” are used here in a broader sense than a narrowly Positivist view would allow.



scientific cannot resort to it.<sup>125</sup> Of course, a theological statement cannot be verified by way of a direct reference to sense experiences as in the case of simple propositions like "There is five feet of snow on Mount Everest" or "It is raining outside". The fact is that even these simple propositions imply more than sense data and presuppose our understanding the social reality of language, which is not so *directly* verifiable as one would think at first. Even the laws of natural science cannot be directly verified or falsified as simple empirical propositions. When we come to the more complex theories in the physical sciences, their truth value will have to be determined in terms of their explicative value, and this often in comparison with competing theories. In the same way, the fundamental belief statements do not require or allow a verification in isolation, that is, by a direct reference to some empirical experience or other, because verification or refutation, both fallible and relative, is possible here only in terms of the explicative, sense-giving and orientated value of the propositions as regards life and reality. To be true and valid, belief statements should have some bearing on reality and one's experience of it, inclusive of sense experience.<sup>126</sup> For orientation,

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125. In the same way, theology may not take refuge in the facticity of the religious "language game", as if it were something that cannot be further interrogated. That a language game is "played" is no reason to suppose that it is a legitimate one. As K. Lorenz has shown, it is necessary to ask how rational or scientific discourse can be justified without presupposing the validity of ordinary language or having recourse to formal symbolism. – Cf. *Elemente der Sprachkritik: Eine Alternative zum Dogmatismus und Skeptizismus in der analytischen Philosophie*, Frankfurt a. M., 1971.

126. Referring to the wide spread suspicion of *experience* in theology, G. Hasenhüttel has drawn attention to the radical dependence of all theology on experience: "Thus, theology is at the same time an action-oriented interpretation of certain perceptions. It cannot simply keep itself out of the process of becoming by claiming to possess an unhistorical truth. As the science of man's conversion, it is essentially related to praxis and lives out of experience. Theology is the science of the experience of conscious human beings". Art cit in Klostermann-Zerfass(eds), *op. cit.*, 632.



especially ultimate orientation, cannot be what it claims to be if it has no bearing on reality. Belief statements, including those of Christianity, would thus be the viewing and valuing of life and reality as a whole, a viewing and valuing that can be life-orienting and life-transforming, only when one is convinced and commits oneself. This means that the verification of belief statements would have to be in terms not only of their explicative, sense-giving value but also of their orientating and life-transforming capacity. In other words, the truth of Christian beliefs and doctrines will have to be questioned *not abstractly but concretely*, taking also into account their practical effects. Though a negative practical realization may not by itself disqualify a theory, it would call the truth or adequacy of the theory in question: the question being whether practical realization is impossible on account of the falsity or inadequacy of the theory or because of other unforeseeable factors. The truth question of belief statements as well as theological assertions will have to be raised thus in the broader context of all our experience and knowledge, the findings of the anthropological, historical and social sciences being especially taken into account. In the evaluation of Christian belief, the general views and valuations of life and reality in other religions and world views will naturally have to receive adequate attention. Thus, the scientific investigation whether and how religious beliefs and doctrines are true and valid is at the same time a criticism of those that are not. The resultant enlightenment would have a liberating impact.

### **The question of relevance**

Just as it may not presuppose the truth of Christian belief but has to pose the question of its verification or refutation, so theology cannot take for granted the relevance of traditional or prevalent ways of conduct and thinking. It has to raise the question of the relevance of Christian theories and practices in view of the needs, problems and aspirations of contemporary men and women. This would mean that it tries to assess the contemporary life and thought situation as carefully and thoroughly as possible. To do this requires the relevant findings of natural and especially anthropological and social sciences as well as expression of contemporary life and self-awareness in art and literature. It would, however, be a mistake to assume that



because a particular Christian doctrine or practice seems relevant today it is directly applicable to present-day living conditions. This is especially so if the matter concerned is unearthed by a historical study of Christian traditions. For the practical relevance of beliefs, doctrines or practices vary greatly in kind as well as in extent, and they would need adaptation or development according to a given situation. The emphasis on the relevance of the Christian message and practice needs to be accompanied by a criticism of their irrelevance in other respects or in certain aspects. A mere appeal to Biblical or magisterial backing is not only unscientific but ultimately ineffectual, as the Bible or Church tradition may contain teachings or practices of the opposite kind and others have as much right to select and dress them up as "real" or "original" Christian theory and praxis.

### Criticism

The critical function is not something added to the scientific investigation of the truth and relevance of Christianity. It is a question of truth and relevance that theology has to raise and try to answer as regards the dialectics of Christian theory and praxis. This would reveal not only positive but also negative aspects or elements of Christian belief and life. It has been indicated how even hermeneutic or historical theology can have a certain relativizing and critical impact on the life and thought of Christians. On account of the negativity of life and thought in Christianity, in world religions and in all spheres of life, it is important to stress the critical moment as something that should necessarily belong to theology. Special attention has to be given to the knowledge-conditioning interests and factors of even the most neutrally objective disciplines. The understanding and description of states of affairs completely disregarding their possible negativity and their consequent need for self-criticism and change could create the impression that reality is in order as it is, or that it cannot but be what it is. This would conceal rather than reveal the negative, changeable aspects of reality that need criticism and change, and thus ideologically legitimize and stabilize the existing situation. To be really critical would mean that theology is aware of structures and mechanisms that have a blinding and enslaving rather than an enlightening and liberating impact. These may be of a socio-political (Marx,



Horkheimer, Adorno, Habermas), psychological (Freud, Reich), or linguistic (Wittgenstein, Carnap) kind. A *critical theology* should not assume that the world is in every way on the right path, or secular views are all right and true, as it should not *a priori* assume that they are all wrong. The world and other ways of thinking may need as much criticism and reform, but theology will have to take extra care not to criticize them *ex cathedra* as if it knew everything and knew it better than others. We have already seen how theology is tempted to repress the less comfortable aspects of Christian theory and praxis and present a dressed up picture of the brighter aspects of Christian reality. This is the opposite of what a critical theology would have to be. Finally, to be really critical, theology needs to be critical of itself and of its own self-awareness and keep itself open to criticism from other men and from other disciplines. It should avoid making criticism an absolute, universal and immutable principle

This means the confrontation of Christianity with other movements, institutions, and ways of life and thought. This confrontation, if it is unprejudiced and open, can relativize and complement one another. A critical theology can realize itself only as a *dialectical* and *dialogical* theory engaging in an open exchange of views and experiences with men of other disciplines and other ways of thinking.<sup>127</sup>

### The search for meaning

Is theology's function exhausted when it examines the meaning, truth and relevance of Christianity? Does it have a more

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127. This applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the practice of inter-religious dialogue. A dialogue that is blind to the negative aspects of the religious traditions concerned and the life situation of the people as a whole is likely to be more an attempt at mutual appreciation and may eventually have a stabilizing impact on states of affairs that need to be changed. - Cf. J. B. Chethimattam, "Man's Dialogical Nature", in *Journal of Dharma*, I, 1975, 21.

In this light, the plea to see the bright sides of the caste system, and not to criticise its negative aspects (cf. Jeevadhara 17, 1973, 428-444) is not only misguided but also dangerous. It seems to derive from a dualistic view of the commitment and knowledge dimensions of religious belief. - Cf. *ibid.*, 433-434.



positive or creative function than therapeutic enlightenment?<sup>128</sup> If Christianity is something that is concerned with the meaning of reality as a whole and the possible or necessary orientation of man's life and activity, the examination and criticism of Christian theory and praxis is something essentially connected with man's *search for meaning*. It could, then, collaborate with those seeking to know if life or reality as a whole, has a meaning and if it has, what it consists in, and what life can or should be especially in view of man's life situation and self-awareness today. Thus, theology comes into close proximity with philosophy in as much as the latter is concerned with the meaning of life and reality as a whole. Indeed, the theologian knows that there is much that is true and valuable in Christianity. This is no obstruction to a critical or scientific inquiry, provided beliefs and convictions are not set up as absolute truths immune from criticism and verification. The theologian may propose to himself the task of offering man whatever light and orientation he believes Christianity may impart to humanity. This brings us to the problem of evaluating and developing what appears to be positively true and significant in Christian theory and praxis. It makes theology something more than an examination of the truth and relevance of Christianity, for the very nature of its investigation and the demands of the life and thought situation in which it is carried out require that theology should participate in humanity's search for the meaning of life and reality. And this is, no doubt, a positive and creative function that theology can fulfil.

## 2. Updating the Christian message?

### The modality of selection

That theology should investigate the *whole* of Christian theory and praxis does not mean that it can or must recommend all that is in the Christian traditions or all that belongs to the original Biblical traditions as ideal. A theology that is critical

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128. The need to stress this point was brought to my notice by Abraham Kootthottil. He has been kind enough to go through the whole article, and I owe much to his perceptive criticism.



and scientific, as has been explained already, cannot be *integralist*. The fact that theology investigates and does not presuppose the truth and relevance of the various elements and aspects of Christianity means that it distinguishes what is true and relevant from what is not.<sup>129</sup> It cannot, therefore, present what it finds negative rather than positive in Christianity as the Christian ideal to be believed and lived. Theology cannot, for instance, advocate the OT ideal of a holy war against the enemies of the chosen people (Dt 1:30; Ex 144 etc.) or the stoning of women caught in adultery (Lev 20:10; Dt 22:21ff) as it may recommend Jesus' commandment of love or Paul's doctrine of the believer's freedom from the law (Gal 2:3-4; 3:13-14, 25ff). This means a certain *selectivity as regards what can be accepted as true and relevant* in Christian theory and practice. In fact, theology has always been selective in some way or other; it has never taken *all* that is in the Bible as equally true and valid. Even Biblical fundamentalists cannot succeed in doing this, as the Biblical traditions contain views and prescriptions that contradict or relativize each other. We need only to contrast the OT emphasis on the Sabbath (Ex 20:8ff; 34:21; Dt 5:12) with Jesus' relativization of its importance (Mk 2:27ff), or the expectation of an imminent parousia in certain passages of the NT with the relativization of this in others.<sup>130</sup> Later theology has been also as much selective or more. For example, the Catholic tradition does not understand strictly the Gospel prohibition of all oath taking (Mt 6:33-37), but interprets rigidly the prohibition of divorce even in the case of adultery, which the meaning of the passage would seem to allow (Mt 19:6,9). Christianity has as much right to select those aspects or elements of its doctrine and practice as it judges to be true and valid ideals to be accepted and lived as any other movement or

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129. T. Rendtorff's conception of a *modern Christianity* is the result of such a selection. Rendtorff contends that now the ethical expression should take the place of Christianity's dogmatic expression, and is right in this if by dogma is meant not theory as such but theory in its dogmatist form. - Cf. *Christentum außerhalb der Kirche, Konkretionen der Aufklärung*, Hamburg, 1969, 44-45. Cf. also Schupp, op. cit., 137-138.

130. Cf. H. Braun, *Jesus, Der Mann aus Nazareth und seine Zeit*, Gütersloh., 1973 (1969), 44-45; Beutler, loc. cit., 151-157.



institution. What is objectionable and what we criticize is, therefore, not so much the selectivity as such but the tactical, apologetic or applicationalist motives of this selectivity and the cryptic manner in which they arise: *the summary dismissal or the quiet repression of the unpalatable aspects of Christian theory and practice as unchristian, or as if they did not exist, and the resultant idealized picture of an "essential" or "original" Christianity.* An objective and truly scientific procedure would attend to the negative aspects of Christian doctrine and practice as well as criticize and renounce them openly rather than merely suppress them. Therefore, when it recommends what it considers to be true and valid in Christian doctrine and practice as the Christian ideal to be lived, theology should 1) *criticize* those views and norms, especially of the Biblical tradition, that might neutralize or negate what it recommends for belief and practice, 2) *acknowledge the selectivity* involved in its formulation of the Christian ideal of belief and life, and 3) give some indication of the *criteria of its selection.* However normative one may hold the Bible or Church tradition, it would seem that the criteria of selection cannot be the mere presence of a doctrine or practice in the Biblical or universal Christian tradition as is often claimed, but its truth and relevance, or better the theologian's apprehension of its truth and relevance, in the light of all his knowledge and experience, and in consideration of the problems and tasks of contemporary humanity. For if something is true and valid just because the Bible says it, one will have to accept *all* that the Bible says and cannot be *selective* as most Christian theology has been, down the centuries.

### The problem of development

Similarly, as a historical reality, Christianity has as much right to develop and update its teachings and traditions. Therefore, theology can and should profit from developments in other areas of human knowledge. Here again, care has to be taken not to read into Christian sources views and ideas that have come about as a result of secular or anti-Christian developments. However great the contribution of the Christian or Biblical message to human liberation, it would be false to claim that Marx's criticism of the alienating socio-economic structures, or Freud's



uncovering of internalized compulsions are fundamentally Christian. True, theology can and should profit from these and develop the Christian or Biblical insights that could have developed in the same direction. But it must acknowledge what is genuinely *new* in modern developments and not christen them by means of retrojection. It is necessary that the acceptance of foreign ideas and the consequent criticism, reinterpretation and development of Christian doctrine should be duly recognized. Only a frank, open and critical theory of what Christianity should be, *not because it has always and everywhere been so but because it can be true and relevant today only by being so*, would prevent theology from being an abstract, arbitrary and one-sided interpretation. This is not to deny that the retrojective selectivity and interpretation is often motivated by a genuine desire to update Christian theory and practice and to make it serve the real needs and aspirations of man today. What theology presents as the "original" or "essential" Christianity is, as a rule, what Christianity *should be* rather than what it actually *is*. We may call this a redefinition in view of a more human praxis, whatever foundation it may have in certain elements of the Christian tradition. Welcome and necessary as this is, theology needs to recognise the limits of its "linguistic legislation" and the risks this involves. It should frankly acknowledge this fact. Otherwise, there is a real danger that the "possibility" or the "ideal" the theologian speaks of is taken for the actual reality. This ambiguity is likely to serve an ideological function in that it can be used to cover up structures and mechanisms that need criticism and change.

## VI. The Practice of Theology

The understanding of theology as the critically scientific investigation of the meaning, truth and relevance of Christianity brings with it consequence for the organization of theological disciplines and the conduct of theological research. A few tentative suggestions would be in place here.

### 1. Organization of theological disciplines

Concerned as it is with the whole of Christian belief and life, the nature of theological research would require the division of theology into different disciplines, not to speak of the division



of work necessitated by the magnitude of the task. With a broadening of perspectives, we may retain the broad traditional division of theology into (i) *hermeneutic*, (ii) *systematic*, and (iii) *practical* theology.<sup>131</sup> It is necessary, however, that there should be closer collaboration between different theological disciplines than is usual,

### (i) Hermeneutics

Hermeneutical theology is more than the traditional historical or positive theology, and considers the meaning of Christianity.<sup>132</sup> It comprises (1) a largely empirical (above all sociological and psychological) study of the meaning of Christian theory and praxis today in the context of contemporary life and thought; (2) Christian history, investigating the dialectics of post-Biblical belief and practice; (3) history of Christian origins, consisting of both OT and NT studies; (4) a study of religions and philosophies which have played a role in the origin or development of Christian beliefs, doctrines and practices and which may, in some way, contribute to a better understanding of man and reality and thus also of Christianity. It would be worth while asking if Christian theology would have been so absolutist and arrogant if it had been better informed of other beliefs and practices.<sup>133</sup>

131. Cr. Ratzinger, art. cit., 775-776.

132. I use the term "hermeneutic" rather than "historical" for this section of theology to indicate that it is to be concerned as much with the present as with the past.

133. It goes without saying that theology's consideration of other religions (and philosophies) will have to be as critical and scientific as possible, taking into account both their theory and praxis. In this respect, both *negative* and *positive* one-sidedness need to be avoided. For Christian theology has till recently been inclined to take a negative view of other religions, and the situation has not changed considerably at least as far as Western theology is concerned - the dominant Christian theology today - is concerned (Cf. the criticism of Küng's "apologetics" above). There are, however, signs of a new thinking in some of the younger Churches of Africa and Asia, though this is, partly at least, a tribute to the changed political climate. It is becoming clear that these Churches cannot live on an "imported" theology and will have to rethink the Christian message in terms of their life and thought situation. But here again, it would be misguided to



**(ii) Systematics**

As we have seen, to be truly scientific, theology needs to raise the question of the truth and relevance of Christianity, and should not presuppose them. This requires a basically systematic inquiry: We cannot investigate the truth and relevance of Christianity except by showing what it is and whether its claim is rationally justified when it is critically confronted with the totality of our knowledge and experience. Now, if Christianity is the ongoing dialectics of belief and life, systematic theology cannot restrict itself to a consideration of Christian belief or theory, as is common today, and claim to be the study of the whole Christian reality. *Systematics will have to thematize the dialectics of Christian theory and praxis in all its positive and negative manifestations.* In other words, the theorization of the praxis dimension is essentially a systematic task, and systematics should not leave it to the care of practical or pastoral theology or dismiss it under the pretext that it has already been dealt with in Church history or Biblical studies. This would make systematic theology and the theory of Christianity which it formulates, abstract, unhistorical and undialectical. To give an example, systematics will have to ask not only what God means in the Bible or in Church teaching but also what consequences this belief has had for the life of the people and whether and how the Christian understanding of God is true and relevant. Systematics need thus to investigate the meaning, truth and relevance of Christianity as a whole and the fundamental aspects of Christian belief and life (God, man, the Church, the world). Therefore, it is not enough to thematize the theory-praxis dialectics in practical or pastoral theology and thus revalue it theoretically, as it would leave systematics as such untouched by the theory-praxis problem.

**(iii) Praxis**

Though systematic theology has to treat the relevance of Christianity in the life and activity of man, it would be the task

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to take an overly positive attitude towards the native traditions, and if all that they contain is good and true and valid. To arbitrarily select and dress up those elements or aspects that seem true and relevant as the "essential" or "original" meaning of one native religious tradition - as the "essential" or "original" Hinduism or Buddhism, for instance - would be inadequate and misleading.



of practical theology to develop the practical consequences of Christian belief for the life and activity of individual Christians and Christian communities. It would treat, first of all, the ethical problems and tasks in the context of contemporary life and thought. This may be called *moral theology* or *theological ethics*, but it will have to include, besides, those themes of traditional moral theology, the criticism of oppressive mechanisms and in-human structures, whether they are of a socio-economic, political or psychological kind, in the Church and society (social criticism) and indicate the responsibility of the Church and of individual Christian in view of a more just and human society and of greater self-fulfilment (social ethics). In the second place, praxis should consider Church life and activity under the rubrics of *pastoral theology*. This would imply investigating the problem of communicating Christian belief (catechetics, homiletics etc.), the expression and realization of ecclesial or, Christian communion (spirituality, liturgy), and the regulations required for orderly personal and institutional behaviour (Church law).

## 2. Theological research

It is a fact that much, if not most, theological research is done with the priests, priestly candidates and the religious in view. Though ultimately meant for all Christians, theology is thus directly addressed to a small minority of ecclesiastical professionals or would-be professionals. Similarly, theologians too are for the most part priests or religious, and most theology today is developed in the context of priestly training or with a view to the priestly ministry. There needs to be detailed sociological investigations to assess the extent and nature of the impact of clerical domination in theology. Probably, there would not have been so much defence and mystification of Church institutions and Church authorities if theology were not developed or controlled by official representatives of Churches. Likewise, the relatively negative view of sex and marriage in many theological writings is at least, to an extent, due to their creation by a celibate clergy. One can only guess the complexes a celibate theologian might have in expounding the meaning of sex and marriage to those who are to be trained to a life of celibacy. The situation may change somewhat if theology ceases to be a clerical preserve: if it is equally addressed to all Christians, indeed, to all those interested in the subject and if more laymen



and laywomen participate in theological research and communication. Increased lay participation could mean less interest in the preservation and increase of institutional authority and bring more secular experience and 'know-how' into theology.

To be true to the wider perspectives and the seriously scientific intent spoken of above, there will have to be more interdisciplinary collaboration between theology and other sciences. Needless to say this has to be conducted in a spirit of partnership, and not with an overt or cryptic imperialist domination, as if theology could guide and direct all other sciences. Here, theology would do well to take Christian views and the relevant insights of other sciences as hypothetical and confront both to test their truth and validity. Even sciences which do not have an immediate, obvious relationship with theological thinking may have some bearing on theology. This is undoubtedly the case with the human and historical sciences like psychology, ethnology, sociology, economics, history, linguistics and medicine. These disciplines can contribute much to the understanding, criticism and verification or refutation of the theological theories.

Though no science is completely free from the influence of extra-scientific factors, it is a generally accepted maxim of scientific disciplines that science cannot be truly objective if its themes, methods or conclusions are dictated from outside. In the same way, theology can fulfil its task of investigating the meaning, truth and relevance of Christianity only if it enjoys real freedom of thought and expression and no opinion is imposed upon it by formal authority. Christian Churches have the right to reflect upon, and formulate from time to time, what they consider to be the basic Christian message. But the very nature of belief means that its acceptance cannot be forced but has to follow the perceptive decision of man. A religion that is really convinced of the truth of its message does not need to be afraid of submitting its claims to rational scrutiny. If Christianity believes in the liberating power of truth and does not have unacknowledged interests to protect, it will not adopt a restrictive attitude to theology, and an atmosphere of trust and confidence is necessary for theology to be truly scientific and really useful to the Church and the world.

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# Social Commitment and Theoretical Motivation - an analysis of the Church's developmental activities in Kerala

In Kerala, the Church's activities connected with development, on the whole, fall into three categories: educational, medical and those connected with development proper. The educational activities cover mainly the schools and colleges. Medical or health services cover the work done in many hospitals and dispensaries run by the Church. By development activities proper, we mean those that contribute directly to the growth of society at the microlevel. Such for example are industrial training centres, small industries, fisheries, agricultural and irrigation projects, etc.

This article is based on *Church and Development in Kerala*, the unpublished report of our research into the developmental activities of the Church in Kerala. The purpose of the research was to study the field and the manner of the Church's activities in Kerala and to analyse these different activities one after the other with a view to finding out how far the Church's social commitment in these different fields measure up to the ideals set, and to offer some suggestions for future improvement.

The Church's developmental activities in Kerala are to be studied in the context of Kerala society in order to assess properly the social commitment of the Church. Our research shows that there is a double reality underlying Kerala society, one integrated in the modernized sector and another non-integrated. These sectors are either shaped or dominated by a capitalist type of economy. The non-integrated sector consists of small farmers, the agricultural labourers (with the exception of the plantation workers, who are directly related to a capitalist enterprise), the small artisans, merchants, porters and the marginalized urban population. Of the Kerala population 75% (in the rural area



80% and in the urban areas 40%) live in this sector. Economically in this section of society, there is little development, but often regression, the demographic factor adding to the burden caused by the socio-economic structure.<sup>1</sup>

Now, the developmental activities of the Church in Kerala are carried out with a view to improving the socio-economic conditions of this marginalized sector. Theoretically at least, the purpose of these activities is the creation of an egalitarian society, in which every group has a possibility of taking part in the economic and social decision-making process. This purpose has clearly been expressed in the course of the past few years by the leaders of the Church. For example, in their communication to the Synod of Bishops on Evangelization the Indian Bishops who met in Calcutta in 1974 state that development "is a liberation from the effects of sin, from all forms of oppression and injustice, even those caused by policies and structures that indirectly perpetuate the gap between the haves and have-nots." Now, to bring about such a liberation, and to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor, an identification through social analysis of the structures and policies that cause the various forms of oppression and injustice seems to be necessary,

### **Importance of the Work done by the Church**

The work done by the Church as an institution in the various fields connected with development is important. It involves the service of many thousand dedicated persons in schools and colleges (840,000 students, i. e., 16.7% of the total student population), in hospitals (550 hospitals and dispensaries) and in development projects (more than 800). It entails also large funds collected inside and outside the country (more than Rs. 32 million of foreign money only for the development projects). All this is done with a view to efficiency and with the express intention of promoting the development of people.

#### **1. The field and the manner of the Church's activities in Kerala**

Speaking of the Church's developmental activities in Kerala it must be said that some of these cannot be described as such

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1. For demographic tables see Appendix 1 at the end;



though they are thought to be so. They fall into two groups. The first comprises those that are meant mainly for the betterment of Church institutions like parishes, convents and dioceses. These include landed properties or plantations, small enterprises organized on a profit basis, private schools for middle or higher social classes and private hospitals serving the same classes and in some cases making money. According to our study, this group forms about 20% of the 'development projects'. Some of these activities may be necessary or useful, but it is not proper that they should be financed with funds allotted for developmental purposes.<sup>2</sup>

The second group is connected with the distribution of food and clothes, and provision of houses etc. which constitute some 10% of the 'development projects'. Food, clothes, houses etc. might form ingredients in development projects but for that it is not sufficient to demand for some work in return for the distribution (food for work, and participation in the construction of the house by the person for whom it is meant).

#### **i) Field of developmental activities**

Now we turn to such activities of the Church in Kerala as are really developmental: training centres, small industries, fisheries, agricultural and irrigation projects etc.<sup>3</sup> There are 816 such projects in Kerala. From an analysis of these projects, it is very clear that the developmental action of the Church takes place at the micro-dimension of the social reality, and so it cannot pretend to solve problems at the macro-dimension.<sup>4</sup> How-

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2. It is interesting to note, in this connection, that schools and hospitals which are not developmental projects, properly speaking, consume a significant share of foreign finances. For example, Misereor gave in 1973 to Kerala, Rs. 1,115,315, Rs. 569,122 for projects, 424,193 for hospitals and 122,000 for schools (technical). This makes nearly 50% for schools (technical) and hospitals.

3. For the table giving the distribution of the projects see Appendix 2 on page....

4. The micro-dimension of society is the level of the inter-personal contacts that take place generally in small social groups, like the family, the village, the neighbourhood. The macro-dimension is the level of the main structures of society, like the



ever, the micro-dimension is dependent very much on the macro-dimension. For the developmental projects working at the micro-dimensional level depend for their success or failure on the general organization of economy at the macro-dimensional.

The contribution of such projects as training centres, small industries etc. to the development of society at the micro-level consists in giving a share in material goods and in the decision-making process of society, especially to the lowest groups, the oppressed ones. Let us now consider the groups for which such projects are intended, how they are carried out and to what extent these contribute to their development.

*a) The Small Farmers, Fishermen and Artisans*

The small farmers, fishermen and artisans benefit from the agricultural, irrigation and fisheries projects, and to some extent also from some small industries and training centres. Some of the rural projects help middle class farmers as well. As a whole, these projects, when successful, have helped small proprietors (of land or boats) and small artisans to increase production. These projects are estimated to constitute more than 50% of the whole. In terms of investment too these have even a larger share of the total.

It is also important to see how these projects are organized. With a few exceptions, these are oriented towards the betterment or the increase of private property. Consequently hardly any organized action has been taken against some of the immediate structures of oppression at the micro-level, for example, the money-lending system. With the increase of the revenue of small proprietors, however, the need for borrowing money has been considerably diminished, and this is already a positive outcome.

The pattern of organization of these projects closely resembles that of the ecclesiastical institutions. The main advantage of this

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economic system or the political organization or even the caste system in India. These have effects on the micro-dimension. And since it is the level of structures, only structural decisions are able to bring about changes here.



pattern of organization is that the projects are spread out geographically, the disadvantages being that their leadership tends to be exclusively clerical and that they remain isolated initiatives except when a diocese covers one district and a series of villages.

When successful, as is the case with many, these projects do contribute to the increase of the material prosperity of the people. However, from available information (Caritas Report etc.), it would seem that these projects have not sufficiently been oriented to give the people much decision-making power in society. Moreover, the absence of a more comprehensive approach to the micro-society often results in increasing the socio-economic gap. The lower socio-economic groups remain at the same level, while others, because of the positive action of the projects, enjoy a real betterment. These are some of the drawbacks that should be remedied.

*b) Agricultural Labourers and Landless Peasants*

When we examine all the projects studied, we see that the agricultural labourers and the landless peasants are almost left out. There are of course some projects for land reclamation, working for Harijans and some others helping the families plant tapioca or breed animals in the ten cents the Land Reform Act has brought them. These do not make up more than 5% of the total number of projects. Another 5% could be counted along with them, but they are only temporary, being a part of the "food-for-work" projects.

What is done for this category of people is very little with regard to group organization for exerting pressure on the economic, administrative and political structures. Of course not much could be done at the micro-level of society. This is a typical case where an action must take place at the macro-level itself: the creation of a powerful pressure-group, the mobilization of other forces to collaborate politically or morally with this group, etc.

*c) Urban Porters, Marginal Populations and the Unemployed of the Lower Strata*

If we leave out some training centres, mostly for girls,



and some small industries situated in urban areas, the Church's projects do not reach the urban porters, the marginal populations, and the unemployed of the lower strata of society. They are the beneficiaries of diocesan or parish charities, but generally not of a developmental activity in the sense defined. Here too, what is needed is action at the macro-level, in order to remove causes rather than treat the symptoms.

## ii) **Field of activities related to development**

Although activities related to development do not constitute development projects, they are, nevertheless, very important. For they have some repercussions at the macro-level of society. The Church's schools, colleges and hospitals fall under this category.

### a) *Schools and colleges*

The purpose of the research was not to make a detailed social evaluation of the schools and colleges.<sup>5</sup> The data we have been able to collect permit, however, some general remarks and some probable hypotheses. In Kerala, the schools have played a rather important role in the uplift of the different communities. The communities of Ezhavas, Nairs, Muslims and Christians have built schools and colleges for their members since the beginning of the century. It had also a great symbolic value at a time when the emancipation of the lower communities was based on the abolition of the social distance and its symbols and the individual upward mobility of their members. Christian schools have played an important role in both.

The Catholic schools and colleges cannot be separated from the economic, social and ideological systems of Kerala and of India. They serve mainly the modernized sector, helping integrated social groups continue and reproduce themselves socially. They help also some individuals from the oppressed groups to enter the modernized sector. But because of the limits of this sector in Kerala, a growing number of young people coming from the lower strata of society do not find jobs. The kind of

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5. For statistical data on schools and colleges see Appendix 3 at the end of the article.



education imparted at the schools make them think that non-manual work enjoys a superior social status and that what matters most is individual achievement. It is little oriented towards the development of the society as a whole. This is the case with both the public and private school system as has been pointed out by various commissions.

We must say that for several reasons, historical as well as sociological, the Catholic school system, though not meant exclusively for the rich, has not done much for the most oppressed groups of society (especially in higher education). When it does, it mostly helps individuals, and therefore does not improve the position of the group as such. It may be asked whether the basic ideologies underlying the school system and its part in the existing socio-political structure make it a factor in the underdevelopment of Kerala society. Social frustrations among unemployed educated youth do not contribute to development.

#### *b) Action in the Field of Health*

Here again we shall not enter into details, for the purpose of the research has not been a study of the social aspects of the health services. At the outset it must be mentioned that the Church has done much in the field of health, both in the cities and in the villages. The number and the distribution of hospitals and dispensaries are enough to prove this fact.<sup>6</sup>

However, when this is viewed in the social set up of Kerala some questions do arise. The medical sector, which is very much Westernised and consists of private hospitals and dispensaries, cater mainly to the needs of the modernised sector of Kerala society. The poor are not excluded altogether, but they cannot afford the services of a private sector which has to be self-supporting, as it is not subsidized by the State. Some do avail themselves of the services, but they form only a small minority of the lowest strata of society. This is due mainly to the socio-economic situation of Kerala, which does not in practice grant that every person has a right to health.

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6. For data on hospitals see Appendix 4



This raises some questions about the social function of the Catholic health services. The trend towards specialization and the expensive equipment it requires tend to convert a charitable work for the poor into a costly private enterprise for the rich. Such an evolution is not born of any deliberate planning, but is the outcome of the increasing institutionalization of medicine, with the result that the condition of the under-privileged remains unaltered. Perhaps, such investments could have been better used for public health and social hygiene, the primary needs of the poor. There are, however, some provisions for public health in Catholic institutions, but they are comparatively few. This is, of course, a relatively new way of thinking in Catholic health organisations, and we cannot expect it to develop at once, but the future surely lies in this direction. It requires a totally new vision of health, which respects the right to health of every person; then it will no more be a privilege of the few who can afford it, or a charity for the many who cannot.

## **2. The real outcome of the social action of the Church**

If the social action of the Church must be in favour of the oppressed, as is clear from the episcopal statement already referred to, the actual outcome must also be assessed from the point of view of the oppressed. However, we are not judging intentions or motives but evaluating the conclusions of a social analysis.

### **i) Consequences of the social and institutional behaviour of the Church**

Here we envisage three main aspects: the Church as the self-expression of the community, the Church as a presence in the modernized sector and the Church as an institution.

#### *a) Self-expression of the Community*

After Independence, the position of the Christian communities among the Indian people was challenged, because of their links with the West and the colonial powers. In Kerala, the Latin hierarchy was still European at the time of Independence. The social build-up of each community in independent India and the rapid Indianisation, especially in Kerala, of the Catholic Church exerted much pressure on the institutional aspect of the



community in question. Hence the fast development of schools and hospitals in the fifties and sixties. This process was accelerated because of the large number of vocations to priesthood and religious life, and the financial support from abroad.

As a result, the emancipation among the Catholics, as well as others, was more cultural than socio-economic. Prestigious institutions and the successful individuals and the patrons they produced bear witness to it. Because of this, social action took the form of charitable activities with no real uplift of the oppressed.

*b) The Presence of the Church in the Modernized Sector*

The presence of the Church in the modernized sector and at the macro-level of society, as an influential institution in Kerala society, has had great advantages for the community. This presence in the macro-structure of society has been used by some of the bishops and priests for the benefit of numerous important projects. The dynamism and the dedication of these persons have helped quite a few cases of State initiatives (small industries, nationalized banks, agricultural or fisheries departments, planning commissions, etc.) to join hands with local projects. People of the underdeveloped sector gained accessibility to the modernized sector.

But, because of her presence in the modernized sector, the Church has adopted, in her social and cultural institutions, the vision, the values and the ideology of the social group integrated in it. This manifests itself in the emphasis given to individual promotion, the high social status attached to non-manual work, the insistence on private property as the basis of economic organization and the ideology that development results from individual endeavour. It is reflected in the relatively small emphasis (now changing) on technical education, the adoption of the consumers' pattern from the modernized group (in food, dress, transportation etc.), the organization of projects along the line of small capitalist industries and their production mainly for the modernised sector.

The Church's approach to the non-modernized sector, which constitutes the majority of the people, has been very much similar.



And action here is envisaged mainly in terms of charitable work for the poor in order to solve the problems of illiteracy, lack of health and socio-economic underdevelopment. The main aim has been to cure the poor from such diseases, rather than to organize society in such a way that it would no longer be the victim of an oppressive system. Hence the tendency to meet this situation with the multiplication of charitable works, and today, welfare projects. With a few exceptions, this accounts for the Church's open or latent opposition to movements of popular emancipation like movements of landless peasants, trade unions, etc. The difficulty therefore, is of finding the new dimension of the social problems and of adopting a real pedagogy of liberation rather than a distribution of benefits for people, who do not want charity any more, but a recognition of their rights in the society.

### c) *Growing Institutionalization*

Any institution needs material support for its existence and functioning. And this calls for the organization of social life. But, the process of institutionalization tends always to give priority to the institution itself rather than to its goals. This social evolution exists also inside the Church. It is found in some sections of the Kerala Church as well. The image of power it creates is becoming rather negative, especially in a society where social emancipation is viewed in terms of socio-economic class, rather than of communities.

In spite of her best motives, institutionalization produces distance between the Church and the ordinary people. Moreover much time and energy is expended on the increase and maintenance of the institutions. In some instances, foreign support has brought about over-institutionalization for, with the easy flow of money, less attention is given to the proportion between ends and means. Besides, increasing institutionalization creates inevitably links with the existing economic or political powers in society. A problem for the Church in any society arises when the process of institutionalization and its concrete consequences begin to hinder the prophetic function of the Church as witness of the Gospel. This, however, is not a problem of the Church in Kerala alone; it is a universal problem. However, the attitude of the Church in Kerala seems to raise some fundamental questions for the future.



## ii) Consequences of the organisation of projects

Its geographically decentralised presence is of great advantage to the Church for the organization of developmental projects at the micro-level. The parish system allows a real and efficient network of initiatives in a whole territory. But there are also some disadvantages of the Church projects on account of the religious character of the institution which takes the initiative and its social and cultural position in the modernized sector of society.

The Church as an institution interprets, on the whole, its social responsibility in terms of charitable works for the poor. The new trend in projects since 1965, or so, shows an awareness of the magnitude of the problem and the urgent need for doing something more than merely carrying on charitable works. All the same, the general attitude remains unaltered. The good will and the generosity of those taking the initiative are directed mainly to the immediate needs at the micro-level of society, with relatively little vision of the macro-level and of the relation between the two. As a consequence, there is a lack of planning, but even more, an absence of the analysis of society in terms of the existing opposition between social groups. Only an analysis of society will make it clear that the oppressed groups should gain power if they are to exert pressure on social and political structures, and that action at the micro-dimension can positively contribute to it.

In most of the projects the initiative is taken by priests and sisters. But this ecclesiastical leadership remains even today quite exclusive, and as a result, projects are often organized from above without any real integration of the people into the management. This pattern seems to be changing now at least in some projects where new experiments are being made. The good will and the generous intentions of the religious leaders, it must be observed, do not always compensate for their lack of competence in certain fields. This accounts for the disproportion between the input and the output in some projects. At times there is disparity between the intentions of the donor agencies and the real needs of the people or the right orientations of the projects as, for example, in some of the hospitals.



In conclusion, some suggestions may be put forward for the future. These concern mainly three aspects of the Church's work in Kerala: her mission in general, and her action at the macro-level of society and at the micro-level. Regarding the Church's mission in general, there is an urgent need for a renewed theological reflection on its mission, social ethics and pastoral orientation. At the macro-level, the Church's prophetic mission should be linked more with the poorest sections of the people than with Christian communities or groups. There is also the need for austerity in buildings, collective life-styles and other symbols of prestige. Finally, at the microlevel, the projects should be re-oriented toward the non-integrated sector of society, with due emphasis on collective property.

### Appendix 1: The Population of Kerala

Kerala covers an area of 38,840 sq. km. with a population of 21,347,375. The tables that follow give some idea of the growing demographic pressure of Kerala that has a predominantly rural (75% of the working population) and agricultural (nearly 60% of the working population) economy.

Table 1: The Evolution of the Population of Kerala, 1901-1971

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>% of Increase</i>
1901	6,396,262	.....
1911	7,147,673	11.75
1921	7,802,127	9.16
1931	9,507,050	21.85
1941	11,031,541	16.04
1951	13,549,118	22.82
1961	16,903,715	24.76
1971	21,347,375	26.29

Table 2: Birth and Death Rates in Kerala, 1951-1969 (in 1000)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Birth rate</i>	<i>Death rate</i>	<i>Natural Increase</i>
1951-60	38.9	16.1	22.8
1966	37.4	10.5	26.9
1967	36.3	10.1	26.2
1968	34.3	10.4	23.9
1969	31.7	9.2	22.5

(Source: *Census of India*)



## Appendix 2: Distribution of the Projects according to their Type of activity

	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
1. Training Centres	211	25.86
2. Small Industries	90	11.03
3. Farming and Fisheries	226	27.69
4. Water works	127	15.56
5. Housing Schemes	74	9.07
6. Roads	65	7.97
7. Social Equipments	23	2.82
	<hr/> 816	<hr/> 100.00

## Appendix 3: Schools and Colleges

**Table 1: Number of Schools and of Pupils in the Catholic Schools according to Levels: 1972 (a)**

<i>Levels</i>	<i>Schools</i>		<i>Pupils</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Low Primary Schools	1,036	53.0	380,859	42.4
Secondary and Middle Schools (b)	762	39.0	456,198	50.9
Technical Schools (c)	83	4.3	5,817	0.7
Colleges	45	2.3	52,429	5.8
Teachers Training Colleges	28	1.4	1,162	0.2
Total	<hr/> 1,954	<hr/> 100.0	<hr/> 896,465	<hr/> 100.0

(a) *Sources:* Catholic Directory of India, 1972; Directory of the Syro-Malabar Hierarchy, 1972.

(b) According to the criteria of the Catholic Directory of India, 1972, upper-primary schools and High schools are added together.

(c) Criteria for the definition of technical schools are not the same in all dioceses. Some include the training centres that we have already included in the development projects. This category is probably over-estimated in this table.



**Table 2: Evolution of the Number of Schools and Pupils in the Catholic Primary Schools: 1941-1972**

	<i>Schools</i>		<i>Pupils</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>% increase</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>% increase</i>
1941	839	100	222,210	100
1959	862	103	283,833	128
1962	933	111	333,251	150
1964	962	115	333,182	150
1969	987	118	367,140	165
1972	1036	123	380,859	171

**Table 3: Evolution of the number of Schools and Pupils in the Catholic Secondary Schools 1941-1972**

	<i>Schools</i>		<i>Pupils</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>% increase</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>% increase</i>
1941	242	100	47,281	100
1959	589	243	216,577	458
1962	574	237	240,143	508
1964	629	260	266,902	563
1969	750	310	385,500	604
1972	762	314	456,198	965

**Table 4: Evolution of Catholic Colleges and the number of Students 1941-1972**

	<i>Colleges</i>		<i>Students</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>% increase</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>% increase</i>
1941	5	100	3,077	100
1959	20	400	12,608	409
1962	22	440	15,291	496
1964	29	380	19,613	637
1969	43	360	44,320	1,440
1972	45	500	53,722	1,743

(Sources: Catholic Directory of India, 1972, Directory of the Syro-Malabar Hierarchy, 1972).

#### **Appendix 4: Evolution of the Number of Hospitals**

<u>1941</u>	<u>1959</u>	<u>1962</u>	<u>1964</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1972</u>
4	34	46	52	103	113



# Christian Participation in Politics –

## A Case Study of the Kerala Church's Political Involvement

What is remarkable about India's population is that it is made up of extremely diverse classes and groups, social, religious, linguistic and otherwise. Owing to its basically pluralistic character the nation's accepted slogans of secularism, socialism, national integration and the like remain as yet unrealised ideals. Each group, while joining the stream of the country's life and contributing its own share to its growth, tries to preserve the walls of separation and protect its cherished interests. Its role in the making of the nation, participation in its common struggles and influence on political structures are not free from sectarian thinking. There have been moments, even in the history of the Independent India when the sectarian interests and common objectives have clashed, and our own growth and development as a nation were hindered. These conflicts often do not surface in their naked form, but appear under the cover of zeal for religion, preservation of cultural identity, or even championing of the good of the nation. But closer examination might reveal that narrow group interests dominate our political life, obstructing progress, causing destructive competition, and leading to further fragmentation of our society. In this context a study of the role religions play in our political life should be of interest to those who are seriously interested in politics as well as to the religious communities whose professed objective it is to contribute to the nation's development.

This article does not presume to undertake such a vast study here. Its scope is limited. It proposes to examine the Catholic community's political life in the state of Kerala during the past two decades. It is not thereby assumed that the Church's political engagement in Kerala is paradigmatic for the whole of India. Far from it. The Church in Kerala, owing to its antiquity and numerical strength, presents many features which have no



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2. The following are the names of the persons who have been appointed as members of the committee:

1. The first part of the paper is devoted to the study of the properties of the function  $f(x)$  defined by the equation



it a convenient pretext to oppose Pattom.<sup>3</sup> In October, 1948, in a gathering of the Congress Committee, the majority of the members, under the leadership of the Catholics, declared non-confidence in the Chief Minister. Pattom immediately resigned and the ministry fell.

The years that followed saw the dominance of the Christians in the Congress Party. As in 1949 Pattom founded a new Political group under the name of the Indian Socialist Party (I. S. P). The Nair Service Society (N. S. S.), and the (Ezhava) Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sangham (S. N. D. P.) were displeased with the Congress. The domination of the Christians in the Congress was so conspicuous that it even came to be nicknamed the party of the Christians.

In 1949, when the State of Travancore-Cochin was constituted, T. K. Narayana Pillai, who was the Chief Minister of Travancore, became the first Chief Minister of the newly formed state. Having in mind the mistake made by Pattom, Narayana Pillai took scrupulous care to please all interest groups, but he could not go far enough. In the question of Devasvams Board politics, Mannathu Padbhambhan, the NSS leader and R. Sankar the SNDP leader, again attacked the Congress. They founded an association called the Hindu Maha Mandalam, whose purpose was to protect the interests of the Hindus. No less than 14 members of the Legislative Assembly joined the association, who were later dismissed from the Congress Party, and the appellation "Christian" seemed to suit the Congress once again.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, the Christians themselves turned against the government, as they felt their interests were in danger owing to the reforms in education, which Panampilly Govinda Menon, the then education minister, was planning to introduce.<sup>5</sup> Panampilly's

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3. Joseph, P. T., *Parties and Politics in Kerala*. Diss. University of Bombay 1958; Joseph, S. C., op. cit., p. 41.

4. Nayar, V. K. S., "Communal Interest Groups in Kerala". In: Smith, D. E., (ed.), *South Asian Politics and Religion*. Princeton, 1966, p. 183.

5. Joseph, P. T., op. cit., p. 274 ff.



Private Secondary School Scheme was meant chiefly to check corruptions in the administration of schools. According to the existing system, the manager's discretion was the law in collecting fees from the students and paying the teachers. In this system evidently there was ample room for corrupt practices and, in fact, there were widespread complaints on the part of the teachers that they were being victimized. Panampilly proposed that the teachers should be directly paid by the government, while the managers gave to the government a specific percentage of their income from the schools. The Catholics totally rejected Panampilly's proposal under the pretext that this amounted to nationalising education altogether.<sup>6</sup> The controversy over the Private Secondary School Scheme, together with charges of corruption eventually made against some Ministers, led to the resignation of the Narayana Pillai Ministry.

The general election of 1952 proved how much the ingroup-fights within the Congress Party had weakened its organizational strength as well as its influence on the people.<sup>7</sup> Although by now the NSS and the SNDP had again come to the support of the Congress, it did not win the majority of seats needed to form a ministry of its own. The Congress then entered into a coalition with the Tamil Nadu Travancore Congress (TNTC), and with the support of two independent members as well as two dissidents from the Socialist Party formed a ministry under the Chief Ministership of A. J. John. John's ministry which came into power on March 14, 1952, died an early death, owing to the rivalries between the two Congresses.

Even in the year 1954, when fresh elections were conducted the Congress did not show any improvement in its strength. None of the three main parties, the Congress, the PSP and the Communist Party of India (CPI) was in a position to form a ministry. As it did not want again to risk a coalition, and was equally determined to avoid Communist rule, the Congress helped Pattom

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6. Nair, P. R., and Pillai, N. P., *A Study of the History Problems of Educational Financing in Kerala, India*. Trivandrum, 1962, p. 6 ff.

7. Turlach, op. cit., p. 118.



A. Thanupillai to form a PSP government. Pattom was one of those Trivandrum Nairs who were convinced that they alone were competent to manage the politics of Kerala. His "infallibility" complex and self-will made it difficult for his own colleagues as well as for the Congress Party to keep on supporting him. What angered the Congress most was the PSP's political activities among the industrial workers which in many instances had led to police action. On the question of the reorganization of the state, the TNTC was embittered that it determined to topple the ministry. Pattom's second ministry fell, when in 1955 the TNTC with the support of the Congress successfully moved a proposal of non-confidence in the ministry.

The second government of Travancore-Cochin was that of Panampilly Govinda Menon. Menon's ministry, right from the start, showed signs of an early death. Menon himself had the ill-reputation of being corrupt. He had with his earlier attempt at educational reforms already alienated the Catholic Community. Mannath Padbhanabhan found in Menon the biggest of all defects; he was not unconditionally favouring the NSS.<sup>8</sup>

The question of reorganization of State again proved to be the biggest stumbling-block. As against the "Aikya Kerala" (United Kerala) Movement; led chiefly by the Communists, some, mainly supported by the Christian and Nair estate owners, demanded an Akhanda Kerala (Undivided Kerala), according to which not only the districts of Malabar and Kasarkode, but also that of Neelagiri should be added to Travancore-Cochin.<sup>9</sup> The proponents of Akhanda Kerala were most disappointed, when in January 1956 New Delhi announced its decision concerning the matter. They accused Panampilly of not having pressed the matter with the Central Government. Syrian and Nair leaders like T. M. Varghese, K. M. Kora, P. T. Chacko, Kumbalath Sanku Pillai, Mannath Padbhanabhan, G. Chandrasekhara Pillai protested against the government decision. Panampilly was forced to resign, when six Congress M.L.A's left the Party in protest.

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8. Ibid., p. 135.

9. Ibid., p. 136.



### The first Communist government

Attracting the attention of the world press, the first ever democratically elected Communist government came to power in Kerala on April 5, 1957, under the Chief Ministership of E. M. Sankaran Namboodiripad (EMS). The Catholic Church was particularly shocked and began to steer an anti-governmental course. It could, naturally, count on the support of the national and international anti-Communist groups and forces. The non-Communist parties were also waiting for chances to attack the government. The first occasion offered itself when the Chief Minister granted an amnesty to all the political prisoners of the State as well as reduced the punishments of many of the non-political ones. Many of the political prisoners of the time were Communists, chiefly those who were held in connection with the Punnapra-Vayalar struggle. The opposition interpreted the general amnesty as part of the specifically Communistic tactics of creating chaos in the country, paving the way for revolution and dictatorship, as well as an open breach of the Constitution.<sup>10</sup> Another point of criticism was the new government policy with regard to police engagements. The police in India, were often employed by the government exactly in the way the British colonial government had done.<sup>11</sup> For the British the Indian police were an instrument for repressing all popular movements in which they always saw a threat to their existence as a colonial power. Even after Independence this colonial policy underwent little change except that the police, so far in defence of the bourgeois capitalistic interests, served now to defend the interests of the Indian petit-bourgeoisie and the landlords. The Communists who were the worst victims of this colonial police-policy in Kerala, announced at the first opportunity, that the police would no more be employed to defend the interests of the rich only and the government would adopt a liberal attitude to strikes and demonstrations, and would do nothing to suppress freedom of press, speech and gathering. But at the same time, EMS made it clear that the police would be always alert to check all kinds of crimes and anti-social activities. The opposition

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10. Malavia, H. D., *Kerala, A Report to the Nation*. New Delhi, 1958, p. 22.

11. Turlach, op. cit., p. 161.



criticized the government's new police policy as opening the way to lawlessness in the State.

The growing criticism of the government took the shape of active and organized protest when the Minister for Education Joseph Mundassery, brought up for discussion, in the Legislative Assembly, a new bill touching on private schools. Mundassery, who was himself a professor in a Catholic College, saw the need even more than Panampally, of muzzling the almighty manager in order to check corruption. The bill sought to introduce four main reforms, namely determining the teacher's payment on the basis of law, economic and administrative control of private schools by the government, control in appointing teachers to ensure that only those properly qualified were appointed, and reservation of a certain percentage of teaching posts for the backward castes and communities. The bill was introduced for discussion in the legislative assembly in July, 1957 and was passed in September the same year.

The Catholics, more particularly the Syrian Catholics of central Kerala, determined to oppose the bill and thereby the government, by all available means.<sup>12</sup> With the help of other interest-groups and political parties they organised country-wide protest demonstrations. The protest measures threatened to assume violent proportions when a huge body of trained paramilitary forces called the Santhisenas (Peace Corps)<sup>13</sup> were kept in ready. Attempts were made through bribery, to encourage defection from the ruling side, in order to topple the government, but this failed.

The Devikulam by-election of May, 1958 assumed disproportionate importance in this context of a clearly polarized fight between the Communists and the non-Communists and it was a great disappointment for the non-Communists that the Communist candidate was the winner. Referring to the result of the by-election EMS stated that by voting for the Communist

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12. Ibid., p. 164.

13. Fic, M. V., *Peaceful Transformation to Communism in India: 1954-1957, A Comparative Case Study of Kerala*. Diss. The Indian School of International Studies, New Delhi, 1962, p. 706.



candidate the people had affirmed their confidence in the Communist government. The Catholics and the non-Communist parties, seeing that the only course left for them to defeat the government was to organize mass-movements on a large scale and create a situation of chaos to a degree that the government was incapacitated to function normally, started the anti-government struggle, calling the *Vimochana Samaram* (liberation Struggle). They supported a student agitation in Kuttanad, and encouraged the students all over the country to join the struggle against the government. The liberation strugglers also exploited every situation to embarrass the government and stifle its functioning. A tactic particularly worth mentioning was the so called Temperance Movement, started in the areas of Catholic concentration, like the districts of Kottayam, Ernakulam, Alleppey and Trichur. The Temperance Movement was aimed at scuttling the business of toddy so that the government could be put under a considerable financial pressure.<sup>14</sup> It is a striking example of how the moral sentiments of the people could be exploited for ulterior political ends.

In the meantime the Education Bill received the approval of the President of India and the Government published it immediately. It should be mentioned that the President got it examined by a Bench of Supreme Court judges before he gave his approval to it, and that the few modifications proposed by the President were immediately accepted by the government.<sup>15</sup>

The fourth of the four desired reforms, relating to the reservation of teaching posts for backward communities and castes brought Mannath Padbhanabhan to the forefront of the agitation. As leader of the NSS, he could not tolerate the idea of giving place to other communities in the NSS Schools. The Catholics gladly accepted Mannam's stand and joined the Agitation and immediately he was made leader of the Liberation Struggle.<sup>16</sup>

Another bill, which was equally attacked by the Liberation strugglers was the "Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill"<sup>17</sup> It was

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14. Communist Party (Publ.). *Kerala's Answer to KPCC Charges*. New Delhi, 1959, p. 27 ff.

15. Turlach, op. cit., p. 185.

16. Narendran, K. K., (ed.), *The Kerala Education Act*, Ernakulam 1963.

17. Turlach, op. cit., p. 186.



passed on June 10, 1959 and sent to the President for approval on July, the same year. The Bill sought to limit the amount of land one could keep in possession. In fact, the Bill did not contain essentially anything more than those reforms envisaged in the programmes of the Congress Party, which had been already implemented at least partly, in other States. Those in Kerala who were to be the most affected by this bill were the caste Hindus and the Syrian Catholics - the leading section of the agitators.<sup>18</sup>

The Catholic Church, the NSS and the Congress rallied, behind Mannam, who openly proclaimed that the objective of the Liberation Struggle was to throw the government out of power, and that the government could not hope to save itself even by withdrawing the bills.<sup>19</sup> The Catholic Bishops officially supported the Vimochana Samaram by publishing pastoral letters in which they exhorted the faithful to oppose the Education Bill even at the cost of their lives. Now that a bill was passed according to all the formalities of the Indian democratic set-up and the constitution of India could not be opposed except on the street, this exhortation could mean only insinuation to violence. The turn of events even seemed to prove that. The para-military volunteer association (Santhisena) was more strongly organized on parish level. The decision of the Working Committee of the Vimochana Samara Samithi of the Archdiocese of Changanacherry requesting that at least one young man from every Catholic family should join the Santhisena, deserves, special mention,<sup>20</sup>

The Agitators declared that not only would they not open their own schools on June 1, 1959, the date fixed by the government, but also that they would not let the government open its own schools. As the government was anxious to avoid a direct confrontation, it postponed the opening date. Between June 14 and July 3 the police opened fire on demonstrators in four places and 15 persons were killed. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru,

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18. Ibid., p. 184.

19. Iyer, V. R. K., *Daniel Came to Judgement*, Ernakulam 1959, p. 54.

20. Ibid., p. 46.



who was in Trivandrum from 22 to 25 June, in order to study the situation personally, suggested that the government should postpone implementation of the law and that it should invite the strikers to a discussion. The government accepted Nehru's suggestion but the leaders of the Vimochana Samaram were unwilling to discuss anything with the government.<sup>21</sup> As the situation began to deteriorate, the then Congress President Indira Gandhi demanded an intervention of the Central Government, according to which on July 31, 1959, the Government of Kerala was dismissed by the President of India.

Fresh elections were to be conducted in 1960. The parties and groups which led the Liberation Struggle were determined to inflict a thorough defeat upon the Communists. It was necessary for them not only to come to power, but also to justify the Vimochana Samaram. Although the Muslim League was considered by the Congress a communalistic party and as such never to be accepted as a partner in electoral alliances, or in the formation of a government, the local leaders of the Congress found it a practical necessity to form a common front with the League as well as with the PSP. The Congress-PSP-League alliance won 93 seats as against the Communists who were victorious only in 26. From the number of seats won by the three-party alliance, their victory was impressive. But counting the number of votes cast in favour of each party, the communists, far from being weakened, could improve their strength by 3'3% whereas the alliance could gain an increase only 0'20% of votes in comparison to the level of their percentage in 1957.<sup>22</sup>

The coalition government under the Chief Ministership of the PSP leader Pattom A. Thanupillai was sworn in on February 22, 1960. As the Congress was unwilling to give the Muslim League a place in the Ministry, the League had to be content with getting one of its members elected as the speaker of the Assembly.

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21. *Indian Affairs Record*. New Delhi, Vol. 5, p. 170 ff.

22. Election Commission, India, *Report on the General Election to the Kerala Legislative Assembly 1960*, New Delhi, p. 33 ff.



Already the same year, the government modified the disputed clauses of the Education Bill, relating to appointment, payment, transfer and pension of teachers, and the freedom the managers were enjoying was essentially re-established. On July 27, 1960, the *Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill* was returned by the President with a few modifications which did not touch the essence of the Bill. The government showed no interest in implementing the law. The Communists criticized the government's neglectfulness and started an agitation. But in the meantime, the Kerala High Court struck down some of the clauses of the law as unconstitutional, and the government decided to introduce a completely new bill.

The group fights within the alliance showed themselves first between Congress and the League. After the death of Sithi Sahib, the Speaker, the League withdrew its support of the government. This did not disturb the Congress as it still enjoyed a comfortable majority. The next in group fight was between the PSP Chief Minister, on the one hand, and R. Sankar and P. T. Chacko, on the other. The Sankar-Chacko front of the Congress accused Pattom of despotism and partiality. The official wing of the Congress was in support of Pattom: Mannam, who was always on the look-out for purging the Congress of its Christian and Ezhava elements, supported the party's official stand. As the crisis came to a head, the Central Government removed Pattom from the Politics of Kerala by appointing him Governor of the Punjab. Pattom's removal from Kerala angered other PSP leaders. They reacted to this political betrayal by withdrawing their support of the government leaving the Congress to go it alone. At the next stage of the ingroup fight the conflict was between Chacko and Sankar. P. T. Chacko introduced the new land reforms bill under the title "The Kerala Land Reforms Act, 1963. Although apparently progressive, it provided many loopholes for the big landowners to escape<sup>23</sup>.

Sanker saw in Chacko, who was administratively more capable and intellectually superior, a threat to his position as Chief Minister. Sankar was waiting for an opportunity to oust Chacko, and such an opportunity offered itself on Dec, 8, 1963, when Chacko became notorious in connection with a car incident

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23. Turlach, op. cit., p. 214.



in Trichur. While the Opposition leaders demanded Chacko's resignation, Sankar declared that he had lost confidence in his cabinet-colleague. There was no other course left for Chacko but to resign. The tragic end of Chacko's career filled his followers with grief and they began the suicidal process of working against their own government. A month after Chacko's death, on Aug. 1, 1964, fifteen Congress MLAs, Chacko's supporters, joined the opposition and voted a non-confidence motion against Sankar. The ministry fell. The fifteen MLAs were suspended from the Congress Party, and founded a new political party named the Kerala Congress, under the leadership of K. M. George.

Before the next general elections in 1965, considerably important political events had taken place, among which deserving of special mention were the divisions in the Congress and the Communist parties as well as the formation of such new parties and groups as the Samyuktha Socialist Party and the Karshaka Thozhilali Party (Peasants and Workers Party). All the top Marxist leaders, except EMS, were arrested in the name of preventive detention. In the election no single party won the majority of seats necessary for the formation of a ministry. But it is interesting to note that 'preventive detention' produced the opposite effect. Counting on the support of some independent candidates, the Marxist Party alone was in a position of thinking of forming a government. EMS tried with the support of other sympathetic parties to form a coalition government. But, as no less than 29 of the Marxist MLAs were in jail and the Central Minister Gulsarilal Nanda was not prepared to release them, Kerala came once again under President's rule.

Six Leftist parties, under the leadership of the Marxists and on the basis of a common minimum programme formed a united front to contest the next general elections which took place in 1967. Although not a Leftist party, the Muslim League also joined the alliance, because it was very much embittered against the Congress. It was evident that in the face of this big alliance neither of the two Congress groups had any chance of success. The Catholic leaders were bewildered. While some of them, like the Syro-Malankara Archbishop of Trivandrum, tried to persuade



the two Congresses to form a common front,<sup>24</sup> others like the Bishop of Trivandrum openly took side with the Congress.<sup>25</sup> The sympathy of some of the Syrian Catholic Bishops was with the Kerala Congress.<sup>26</sup> The united Front won a landslide victory with a total of 117 seats leaving only 9 seats for the Congress and 5 for the Kerala Congress.<sup>27</sup>

When EMS as the leader of the biggest party in the United Front, formed the ministry, he made it a point to give every party a share in it, in order to avoid conflicts between the member parties right from the start. Yet, tensions were felt much earlier, the most obvious being between the two communist parties. Besides the differences between the parties, the biggest hurdle of the 'Front' government was the inimical attitude of the Central Government, whose party, the Congress, had openly proclaimed its intention of toppling all non-Congress State governments.<sup>28</sup> The Central Government also began its mean politics with rice. The government at the Centre had always known that one of the best means of fostering discontent among the people against the State government was to reduce or not deliver in time the due quota of rice for Kerala, the staple food of the Keralites. This politics over rice created the strange situation in Kerala of the ruling party itself organizing strikes. The Marxist Party organized *bandhs* to protest against the neglect of Kerala by the centre.<sup>29</sup> But this again weakened the United Front, as some of the member parties did not favour the Marxist policy.

In spite of all these limitations it should be acknowledged that the Front Ministry did achieve a few things. Some among them were the abolition of Prohibition and the introduction, for the first time in India, of the State Lottery. Both these measures

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24. Ibid., 244.

25. *The Indian Express*, Kerala Morning Edition, Madurai, 28. 10. and 25. 11. 1966.

26. Turlach, op. cit., p. 245.

27. *The Times of India*, Bombay, 10. 2. 1967.

28. *The Indian Express*. Bombay, 8. 1., 9. 1, 11. 1, and 5. 2. 1968; *Link*. New Delhi, 14. 21. 1. 1968.

29. Turlach, op. cit., 251 ff.



considerably added to the income of the State. It is also to the credit of the government that land was distributed to the peasants and the landless. It was the long cherished dream of the Marxists and other Leftist parties to introduce and implement a thorough-going land reform law. Chiefly envisaged were three main programmes: 1) the right of possession of the land to the hutment dwellers (*kudikidapukar*), 2) total abolition of the system of landlordism, 3) a ceiling on the amount of land one would possess and distribution of the surplus land among the landless. No sooner had the government begun to take steps to introduce such a Bill than the opposition as well as some of the member-parties showed signs of restlessness. They thought it best to topple the government before such a bill was given shape at all. It is interesting to note the fact that the Congress, the Kerala Congress and the Swathanthra Party, in a gathering at Kottayam, formed a "Citizens Front" (*Paura Munnany*) to fight the government.<sup>30</sup> The Citizens' Front was reminiscent of the "Vimochana Samara Samithi", both in content and objective.

But the opposition came out in the open not in the name of the Land Reform bill. This time they found another convenient pretext: corruption charges. Some of the Ministers were accused of corruption and their resignation was demanded. When a vote on this question was taken, the Right Communists and the Muslim League voted with the Opposition and this led to the collapse of the 31 month-old government.

### Analysis

From the brief survey of the last two decades of the political history of Kerala one thing seems immediately evident: Religious and caste interests have played a decisive role in the politics of the State. Thinking in terms of the interests of caste and groups has led to the formation and division of political parties, to general elections, the constitution of governments and administrative policies. In-group fights on the basis of caste and religious interests have brought about the collapse of many governments. Even today politics often appears as the stage where each community demonstrates its strength. In politics the Chri-

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30. *The Indian Express*. Bombay, 14.8., 30.9, and 2.10.1967.



stians have, just like any other community, behaved as a caste anxious to defend their own interests. Among the various Christian communities, the most caste-conscious group has been the Catholics, especially the Syrian Catholics. Most of them claim to be the descendants of those Christians once said to have been converted by Thomas the Apostle, from the higher Hindu castes. (The Syrian Catholics of the diocese of Kottayam, the so called "Sudhists" trace their origin back to the Christians said to have immigrated from Syria in the 4th century. As the world's most arrogant caste-conscious group, they take utmost care to preserve the purity of their group.) The Syrian Catholics were considered in many places as belonging to a higher caste (Savarnas) and as such they enjoyed some of the privileges of the caste Hindus. They even adopted some of the elements of Hindu customs, rituals of worship and religious ceremonies, feasts and social behaviour. Their attitude to the avarnas (outcastes) was chiefly determined by their consciousness of belonging to a higher caste. Till recently the Syrian Christians also, like the Savarnas, bought, employed and sold the avarnas as slaves and showed little concern about the social and economic problems of the neglected and exploited section of the people. In the Church's own official set-up the avarnas had hardly any place. Only those who belonged to "good" families could be ordained priests. Even today the Syrian Catholics of Kerala belong to those religious groups of the world, who are the most conservative-minded, who cherish oppressively rigid social customs, blindly believe in traditions and violently resist social changes.

As a moneyed and influential caste of central Travancore, the Syrian Catholics have been capable of organizing protest movements which governments had to reckon with. The Church's interference in many instances have been decisive. Two questions seem to arise here.

- 1) How far is caste-thinking and the resultant social behaviour justifiable according to the Christian vision of life?
- 2) Even when as a caste the Church intervened in politics, whose interest within the same caste has it sought to defend?



The first question touches the very essence of Christianity. The Gospel of Jesus Christ seems to deny and overcome all kinds of division in the society based on race, colour, culture, nation, social position, money, and even religion. If the message of Jesus Christ was not to create a caste or a closed community but to eliminate and overcome such distinctions aiming at the formation of a new humanity where every one was a brother to everyone else, the caste-thinking of the Syrian Catholics of Kerala does not seem to be justified by the Christian faith it professes. If the caste system is totally unchristian and very inhuman, then the biggest failure of the Church in Kerala seems to consist not so much in not protesting against the caste system, as in trying to be a caste. It is worth thinking that the sage who taught the doctrine of "one caste, one religion and one God for man" was not a Christian theologian but an Ezhava, Sri Narayana Guru, and that only the Marxists could succeed in politically organizing the people with a political philosophy cutting across all religious and caste boundaries.

The second question, relating to the purposes and motives of the Church's interventions in politics may be disputable. What seems clear from history is this: It was either the interests of the moneyed and influential section of the Catholics, or the interests of its own institutions that motivated the Church's political interventions.

It was the Catholics who pulled down the first Pattom administration, their grievance being that they, who sacrificed men and money to oust the despotic C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer, were not given representation in the administration. One cannot, of course, justify Pattom's communalistic behaviour, but the behaviour of the Catholics in reacting against Pattom's communalism was itself communalistic. It should be further observed that a handful of disappointed leaders had no scruple about toppling a government in order to assert themselves, forgetting the common good. The same may be said of the fights for leadership within the Congress party or the government. The growth of the Chacko group in the Congress leading to the formation of the Kerala Congress is a typical illustration in point. It is no excuse for the Church to say that in such matters it was officially neutral. One has to take into account not only the statements of the hierarchy but also the silent consent of those who belonged to it.



It is a permanent feature of the politics of the State that the Catholic and Nair interests have consistently opposed land reform bills. The reason is evident. Most of the big landowners belong to these groups. The Catholic Church, which preaches in and out of season the values of brotherhood, justice and equality, takes sides with the same groups. It is true that in the name of social work the Church has done works of charity and exhorted others to practise it, but rarely has it clearly told the rich that they are in justice bound to distribute their surplus land and money to the poor. It is common knowledge that many landlords even today successfully evade the demands of the Land Reform laws. The Church and the religious orders also do the same under the pretext of being charitable institutions.

The most powerful and explicit interventions of the Church has been in the matter of school politics. Any attempt of the government to bring the private schools under any sort of control has been vehemently and consistently opposed by the Church. The reforms which C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer, Panampilly, Mundassery or A. K. Antony wanted to introduce in the field of education could never be convincingly proved to be against the interest of education or the common good. The argument that the Church has invested its money for the building of the schools and therefore the government has no right to interfere in its running is meaningless. This argument is reminiscent of the capitalistic philosophy which exaggerates the freedom of those who have money. Such an argument loses sight of the social and moral aspect of private possessions. Schools, at any rate, are meant for educating the future citizens of a country, and as such they are public institutions. A government whose duty it is to promote the common good and work for the welfare of the nation has every right to regulate and guide through legislative and administrative measures the working of such institutions.

The Church, of course, conscious of the flaw of the capitalistic argument, does not present it in its pure form. Instead it mixes it up with the question of the rights of the minority guaranteed by the constitution of India to conduct their own educational institutions. It is questionable whether in a free secular state it is relevant to make distinctions in the population



between minorities and majorities. The sole justification, if at all, of such distinctions consists in the necessity of respecting the cultural and emotional interest of particular groups who are minorities. But the way in which the Catholic Church in Kerala interprets this point is a classical example of how the intention of a law can be stretched to its extremes and how it can be so misused as to produce the opposite result. In the State of Kerala the Christians form one of the majority communities and they are the owners of the majority of educational institutions. In a situation such as this, appealing to the rights of minorities with a view to defending their possession of schools and colleges seems to miss the point completely. Besides, the Church's constant concern seems to be not about the content and quality of education, but about the financial and administrative freedom of the managers. It is surprising that the Church, which is the biggest educational agency of the state has hardly ever raised the question of remodelling the educational system in such a way as to assist the creativity of the students as well as to help the social and economic growth of the country. The present system of higher education in India is the one introduced by the British during colonial times for the purpose of training clerks and administrative personnel.

A comparison between two events could show all the more evidently that the Church's political interventions were to defend her own interests as well as those of the privileged sections of the people. In 1959 and in 1973 the Church took the trouble to win the support of all possible parties and groups and led the protest actions against the government, when the latter wanted to bring about certain reforms in education. In the struggle of 1973 the Bishops personally led protest demonstrations on the streets. But, in the early 1960's when thousands of hill cultivators were evicted from the forests of Amaravathi, Kottiyoor and Udumbanchola, neither the Catholic politicians nor the bishops made any protest. Not only that. They even tried to isolate people like Fr. Vadakkan who criticized the culpable silence of the bishops and other Catholic leaders. Why did the Church show unconcern even when the majority of the evicted families were Catholics, if not because she either did not want to oppose the anti-communist government of Sankar and P. T. Chacko, or because it did not see any of its financial and institutional interests in danger?



The Church's sympathy and support has always been for the political parties which it thought would defend her own institutional interests. This is precisely one of the main features of the communalistic stand in politics. It always aims at obtaining more favours and privileges from the State, but is least conscious of its own duties towards the State.

### Anti-communism

The only political party in Kerala which the Church officially considers its enemy is the Communist party. The Church's main arguments against Communism are that it is atheistic and anti-democratic.

After India's independence, the Church in India has never ceased from giving her oral support to Democracy. She even seems to give the impression that democracy is a system of government invented by the Church and that the Church herself is a democratically organized institution. But everyone knows that the Catholic Church is organized according to the principles of medieval feudalism and that the Pope is a monarch. Nor is Indian democracy an invention of the Church. In fact from national and international history it is all too clear that her record is not a defence of her sincerity in her post-independent democratic claims.

In the face of the fact that the countries which colonized the nations of Africa, Asia and the Americas are the 'Christian countries' of the West. That colonialism is no democracy makes the claim of the international Church to be the champion of democratic values sound ridiculous. When and where has the Church raised her voice against colonialism? Far from protesting against the Western man's brutal invasion of other continents, the Church welcomed it as an opportunity to spread Christianity. Was Stalin's dictatorship in Russia worse than the Englishmen's dictatorship in India? Is the number of the victims of Bolshevik revolution in Russia greater than the number of the Red Indians murdered by the Christian invaders of the Americas? Has the Church anywhere willingly welcomed the people's struggles for liberation from colonial rule? The history of India's independence struggle is too recent for us to forget the negative attitude which the Church adopted to it at that time. She cannot hope to



attempt to appeal to historical factors to justify its anti-independence propaganda by characterizing the struggle of the Indian nationalists as anti-Christian and by naming Mahatma Gandhi Anti-christ. Even today some of the African countries are in the throes of the struggle for independence. Is the Church the champion of independence in those countries? The Church's lip-service to India's democracy is only part of her opportunism.

The argument that Communism is atheistic overlooks an important truth. The birth-place of Communism was "Christian" Europe, at a time when God and religion served as ideological justification for the capitalists and rulers to exploit the poor man. The Church certainly was, in many ways, a superstructure protecting and justifying the socio-economic substructure of feudalism and capitalism. Was Marx to be blamed for appealing to the workers of the world to throw off their chains and create a classless society? Even looking at the capitalistic West of today, who could say that God is given a better place there than in socialistic countries?

The truth is that the Church's anti-Communism is rather blind and motivated by opportunism and imported from North America and Western Europe. The Church seems to see only that picture of Communism drawn by the Capitalistic powers of the West whose interest in anti-Communist propaganda is more political than religious. The Church in India has always been speaking their language, accepting their interpretation and criticism of Communism as the true one. Perhaps, the Church can never adopt an independent stand on the question as it is culturally and financially dependent upon the Western block.

#### **Fr. Vadakkan**

In connection with the Kerala Church's anti-Communism Fr. Vadakkan, the founder of the Anti-Communist Front (ACF) deserves special mention. The Front which he founded in 1951 was a movement to fight the growing influence of the Communists among the workers as well as to organize them against capitalistic exploitation. But as the movement gained strength, the official Church and the rich made use of his organizational capabilities and mass influence to fight communism exclusively so that



in practice the ACF came to be only an anti-Communist front. After ten years of anti-communistic activities, Vadakkan came to realize that the official Church and the *petit bourgeoisie* were utilizing him and his followers for their own selfish ends. He also learned from close contact with the Communists that, unlike what the Western critics have propagated, Marx's social theory, in spite of its philosophical inadequacies, contained many important truths conveniently overlooked by the capitalistic world. It was in 1962, in connection with the eviction of hill-cultivators from the eastern mountain ranges of Kerala, that he began to move from conflict to co-operation with the Communists. He criticized the Church for its callous neglect of the problems of these poor peasants. The only political party which voiced the sorrows of the victims of the government's cruel action were the Communists. He decided to join hands with the Communists in the fight for the cause of these people. He also proposed the theory, to justify his action that it is not wrong to co-operate with anyone on a practical basis to work for the common good. Vadakkan's criticism of the official Church's culpable inactivity as well as his co-operation with the Communists brought obloquy on him. When Vadakkan went even further to prove that behind the eviction of the peasants stood the capitalistic vested interest groups, most of the bishops and the communal leaders felt embittered. His own bishop forbade him to address public gatherings or publish anything which was not censored. It can be imagined what this punishment meant for Vadakkan who is a powerful public speaker and the editor of a daily newspaper. He obeyed the bishop, but went on organizing the peasants. He found that a political framework was necessary to organize his supporters to fight for the cause of the peasants and the working class. On March 4, 1962, he let them found a political party called Karshaka-Thozhilali Party (Peasants and workers Party: K. T. P.). The K. T. P. took a course clearly against the Congress government which had ordered the eviction. When it was evident that Vadakkan would no more support the rich and the communalistic interests, they began to isolate him. The more they did so, the more he moved to the left and co-operated ever more closely with the Marxists. The K. T. P. was a partner in the United Front ministry of 1967. Vadakkan's opponents charged the K. T. P. minister B. Wellington with corruption and demanded his resignation. It was Wellington's resignation that finally caused the collapse of the United Front



ministry. On closer observation it becomes clear that the opponents of Fr. Vadakkan are the same interest groups who formed the core of the *Vimochana Samaram*, and that the real content of anti-Communism were the same vested interests.

### The politics of opportunism

The official and traditional attitude of the Catholic Church has been that, as a spiritual institution in her nature and purpose, the Church should remain neutral in political matters. But in the course of history she seldom practised this principle of neutrality. On the contrary, she has often been led to the adoption of short-sighted and opportunistic politics. This is true at least in the case of the Church in Kerala. It is hard to justify opportunistic politics either on the basis of theological principles or on the basis of principled politics. It is interests rather than principles that have motivated the Church to intervene in politics. Whenever her interests seemed to be challenged, she took sides with other similar opportunistic groups or sought their co-operation and followed a course of action dictated merely by expediency. To mention only two of many examples: to defend her interests in the sphere of education, the Church has always charged the government with attempting to nationalize private schools and thereby violate minority rights. (For the sake of argument, let us, at this moment, concede that the educational reforms amounted to nationalization of education, although till now no government has gone so far.) Now, no one would argue that the nationalization of the N. S. S. schools is a violation of the rights of a minority, precisely because the Nairs do not belong to a religious minority. Yet the Church not only sought the co-operation of the N. S. S. but also made Mannathu Paddhanabhan the leader of the struggle against Mundassery's Education Bill. What is the theological and political justification of this course of action? Another example: The reason why land reform attempts have never been fully successful is the cunning pressure of the big landowners. Some of these landowners are Catholics and Catholic institutions. Though the official Church has never openly protested against land reform laws, her sympathy seems to go for those political parties and groups which would never welcome radical reforms, rather than for the more socially oriented political parties. In their own case religious orders and other Catholic



institutions always know how to make use of the exemptions granted by the law. Where such exemptions are not provided by the law, they do not hesitate to have recourse to other means.

It is not contended here that the Church should not make its presence felt in politics. Only a dualistic philosophy which upholds separation between heaven and earth, body and soul, Church and State, can subscribe to such an opinion. A dualistic view of reality, which is theoretically unjustifiable and practically unverifiable, would logically lead to political opportunism, and this is borne out by history.

The Church cannot remain indifferent in the sphere of politics where many important decisions of individuals and groups are made and the future of nations is determined. She should not fight shy of voicing her opinion, or even organizing programmes to fight injustice, exploitation and corruption as well as to promote the common good of all sections of the people. A principled political commitment seems to be the best guarantee against a politics of opportunism and self-interest.

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# The Indian Ideology –

## Remarks on Manu's Defence of the Caste System

India's caste system may be one of the most inhuman social systems of the world. With its thousand and one precepts and prohibitions, the caste has been able to regulate the minute details of the individual's life, erect walls between man and man and condemn large sections of the people to inhuman conditions of life. The caste is no doubt the result of a complex historical process, and racial, cultural, economic, geographical and political factors have gone into its making<sup>1</sup>. Caste difference is not identical with class difference, but it is doubtful if caste discrimination could have flourished so long and gone to such lengths without the backing of socio-economic and political power and the *ideology*<sup>2</sup> which it produced to legitimize and stabilize the whole thing. There are certain basic beliefs and dogmas that gave the system the status of a natural or divine institution, made its observance a religious duty, and immunized it against criticism. These seem to constitute the most important ideological component of Indian thought; indeed, they may be said to make up *the* Indian ideology.

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1. Cf. J. H. Hutton, *Caste in India*, Cambridge, 1946; J. Arakkal, "Jāti: Cīla Nirīkṣaṇaṅgal" in *Ente Lokam*, Cologne, I, 1974, Nos. 1–2 and II, 1974, No. 1.

2. The word 'ideology' is used here to mean those ideas and beliefs that are meant to or used to justify traditions, practices or situations that cannot be justified rationally. Critical examination is likely to reveal the knowledge-governing interests of such beliefs and doctrines. This understanding of *ideology* is related to Marx's (cf. *Deutsche Ideologie*, Werke, III Berlin, 1962), but is more neo-marxist than strictly Marxian. Cf. T. W. Adorno, *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit. Zur deutschen Ideologie*, Frankfurt, 1968; H. Marcuse, *Der eindimensionale Mensch. Studien zur Ideologie der fortgeschrittenen Industriegesellschaft*, Neuwied-Berlin, 1970 (1964).



Though there are statements that favour or justify caste discrimination in several books of the Hindu śruti, the most typical expression of the caste ideology may be found in the Hindu law-books, the Dharma-śāstras. The purpose of this short article is to draw attention to the ideological character of Mānava-dharma-śāstra or Manu-smṛti, the most systematic and most influential codification of Hindu laws. The extant Manusmṛti, attributed to the mythical personage Manu, is a collective work and dates back at least to the early centuries of our era.<sup>3</sup> It contains laws and regulations that might have originated at different times and in different communities, some of them contradicting one another. Therefore, the proper understanding of Manusmṛti would require the investigation of the origin, development and codification of the different traditions in terms of the dialectics of beliefs and life-interests. Such a study is still outstanding, and I do not presume to be qualified to make even a beginning in the direction. Therefore, I shall consider the extant Mānava-dharmaśāstra as it has been there for centuries, influencing the life and thought of generations of Indians, including those Moslem and Christian converts from Hinduism who are Hindu at least in this respect.<sup>4</sup>

The way the word 'dharma' is usually understood betrays a basically conservative tendency.<sup>5</sup> For dharma refers not only to those rules and laws that regulate man's conduct, social and individual, it refers also and above all to the cosmic law, ṛta. In fact, it is in virtue of its being the law of being or the law of the world that dharma becomes the law of man's life and conduct. "The pattern of the *laws of behaviour* corresponds with the pattern of the *laws of being*."<sup>6</sup> True, the laws of behaviour have or should have something to do with the reality of man's life and the world. But to make this a matter of *ontological*

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3. Cf. *The Laws of Manu*, translated by G. Bühler Oxford. 1886, Introduction, 117.

4. There are even church men who take pride in their high caste origin, Cf. V. Mehta, *Portrait of India*, New York, 1970, 489-491.

5. Cf. H. Zimmer, *Philosophie und Religion Indiens*, Frankfurt, 1973 (1973), 146), ff.

6. T. M. Manickam, "Manu's Vision of the Hindu Dharma", in *Journal of Dharma*, I, 1975, 104.



correspondence would raise historically conditioned laws and regulations to a cosmic or ontological status and give them an absolute, metaphysical quality. It is not surprising in this perspective that dharma is viewed as eternal, *sanātana*, and that one's duty, *svadharma*, is determined by what one *is* by birth rather than through decision. In this way of thinking, what, *is*, *sat*, is good; what is not, *asat*, is bad. One's duty is to *be* what one *is*, or to become aware of what one *is*. It is not realized that what *is*, is often not as it *can* or *should be*, and thus, what *is*, is not necessarily good.<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, it may be bad, and in this case, what *is not*, would be the good man can and should strive for, and this would imply criticism, change or overthrow of the existing situation rather than conformity with it. One attains to one's true self not *simply* by being what one *is*, but by becoming what one *is not*, by change, revolution, *metanoia*. The truth of our being consists not so much in *knowing* what we *are*, but in *realizing* what we *can be* and thus are not. This realization is, of course, not independent of what we are but dialectically related to it. The upaniṣadic *tat tvam asi*<sup>8</sup> would in this light have to be as much a matter of praxis, karma, as of theory, *jñāna*. Such an approach can hardly accept doing a "duty" that is found to be devoid of merit rather than one that is found to be good; it would rather challenge or overthrow a duty, dharma, that is less than good, and not submit to it merely because it is said to be one's *own* duty, *svadharma*.<sup>9</sup>

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7. This is not something unique to Indian thought. Cf. G. Hasenhüttl's observations on the "theoretical emphasis" of Aristotelian and scholastic thought, published in this issue of *Jeevadhara*. Cf. also Marcuse, op. cit., 146 ff., 146 ff.

8. Cf. Chāndogya Upaniṣad, 6: 8; 7; 6: 9: 4; 6: 10: 3; 6: 12: 3.

9. Cf. Bhagavad-Gīta, 18: 47-48; "Better to do one's own duty (*svadharma*) though void of merit than to do another's duty (*paradharma*) however well performed. Doing the works (*karma*) that inhere in one's own condition (*svabhāva-niyata*) one remains unsullied. One should not lay aside the works that are inborn in each of us, even though they involve demerit (*sadoṣa*), for all enterprises are associated with demerit as is fire with smoke." Cf. also 3: 35. The translation is R. C. Zahner's.



The fact that one's dharma is essentially varṇāśramadharma binds man to the role he has to play according to his birth and age. We cannot enter here into the enslavement this means to the individual's *free* self-realization, whatever caste one may belong to.<sup>10</sup> Our concern is rather the way this compartmentalized the society, erected a rigidly hierarchical social system and favoured the oppression and exploitation of large sections of the population in the name of religion and morality. For if the caste system is something natural and god-given, its inequality and discrimination are not wrong. On the contrary, man is bound to accept them willingly, without protest.

It is in this light that we should understand Manu's repeated stress on the divine authority of what he says: "In order to clearly settle his (i. e., the Brāhmaṇa's) duties and those of the other (castes) according to the order, wise Manu sprung from the Self-existent, composed these Institutes (of the sacred law)." (1 : 102).<sup>11</sup> The brahman is to study and teach them (v. 104), and if he does fulfil its injunctions, "he is never tainted by sins, arising from thoughts, words, or deeds" (v. 104), but will secure welfare, learning, fame and supreme bliss (v. 106; cf. 10 : 131). "In this (work) the sacred law has been fully stated as well as the good and bad qualities of (human) actions and immemorial rule of conduct, (to be followed) by all the four castes" (1 : 107). This rule of conduct corresponds to or follows from the order of creation. "But for the prosperity of the worlds, he caused the Brāhmaṇa, the Kṣatriya, the Vaiśya, and the Śūdra to proceed from his mouth, his arms, his thighs, and his feet" (1 : 31). Manu describes in detail the duties and occupations of the four castes, varṇas, brahmins (priests and scholars), kṣatriyas (warriors, princes), vaiśyas (peasants and traders) and śūdras (servants) (1 : 87-91).<sup>12</sup> Of these, the first three castes are twice-

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10. It needs to be asked in what sense dharma, understood as varṇāśramadharma, "uplifts" a cāṇḍāla or even a brahman woman "to heights of honour and greatness" (Bhagavandas, *The Science of Social Organization*, I, Madras, 1932, 48, quoted by Manickam, 105).

11. Numbers in brackets refer to chapters and verses of Mānavadharmasāstra. The translations are from Bühler, op. cit.

12. The word 'caste' does not bring out the difference between varṇa, colour, "class" and Jāti, birth, the community to which one belongs by birth. While there are only four basic varṇas, which group together the pure and relatively pure (śūdras) castes, there are hundreds of Jātis, many of which are avarṇas, outcastes. According to the 1901 census, there were 2378 Castes in India. Cf. J, Arakkal, art. cit.



born, dvijas, whereás the śūdras have only one birth (10 : 4). All others are outside the pale of the system (*ibid.*). They are out-castes, avarṇas, and as such are not born from the four parts of the deity (10 : 45). Divinely instituted as they are, the caste duties are absolutely binding. Those members of the four castes, relinquishing their proper occupations except in case of distress are to become servants of the dāsyus,<sup>13</sup> after having passed through despicable bodies (12 : 70; cf. vv. 71-72). It goes without saying that this must have been a powerful incentive to observe the caste duties. It facilitated the acceptance of intolerable living conditions without criticism and protest. For if the evils of the present life are the consequence of one's own actions in a past life, karma, there is no use in criticism or protest. All that one can do is to bear them patiently and hope for a better life next time. As if this other-worldly sanction were not enough, Manu enjoins the king to see that the caste duties are observed by all (7 : 35).

Manu interprets the story of man's origin in the ṛgvedic puruṣasūkta<sup>14</sup> in such a way as to establish the superiority of those higher up in the social ladder as something divinely instituted and therefore immutable: "Man is stated to be pure above the navel (than below); hence the Self-existent (Svayambhū) has declared the purest (part) of him (to be) the mouth" (1 : 92). "As the Brāhmaṇa sprang from (Brahman's) mouth, as he was the first-born, and as he possesses the Veda, he is by right the lord of all creation" (v. 93). As R. C. Zaehner points out, seldom in the history of the world has a class of men arrogated to themselves such powers and privileges and such divine honour as the brahmans of India:<sup>15</sup> "Of created beings the most excellent are said to be those which are animated; of the animated, those which subsist by intelligence; of the intelligent, mankind; and of men, the Brāhmaṇas; ... The very birth of a Brāhmaṇa is an eternal incarnation of the sacred law; for he is born to (fulfil) the sacred law, and becomes one with Brahman. A Brahmana, coming into existence, is born as the highest on earth, the lord of all created beings, for the protection of the treasury of the law. Whatever exists in the world is the property of the Brāhmaṇa; on account of the excellence of his origin the Brāhmaṇa is indeed, entitled to all. The Brāhmaṇa eats but his own food, wears but his own apparel, bestows but his own alms; other mortals subsist through

13. The word 'dāsyus' meant originally enemy; later on, probably due to changed historical circumstances, it came to mean servant or slave,

14. Cf. Rg-Veda, 10 : 90 : 12

15. Cf. R. C. Zaehner, *Hinduism*, Oxford, 1966 (1962), 109-110.



the benevolence of the Brāhmaṇa" (1:96-101). "By his origin alone a Brāhmaṇa is a deity even for the gods, and (his teaching is) authoritative for men, because the Veda is the foundation for that." (11:85). No wonder if the "gods on earth", bhūdevas or bhūsuras, could lay claim to all sorts of rights and privileges.<sup>16</sup> And the ordinary mortals were naturally reluctant to refuse what the brahmans sought.

Some of Manu's ordinances are meant to assure the priestly class the means of subsistence without undue care. A certain emphasis on gifts is in this sense understandable (cf. 1:86). So is also the injunction that the brahman is not to take up other occupations except in case of distress (4:2-7). As it proceeds, however, to lay down what the brahman should do or avoid, the legislation becomes strange and self-interested. For instance, the brahman is asked to take care not to "unduly fatigue his body" (4:3); he is to avoid at all costs serving the others, the only occupation allowed to the śūdras, as service is in reality the "dog's mode of life", śvavṛtti (vv. 4-6). Agriculture is either strictly forbidden or allowed with great reluctance. For Manu fears that the brahman, engaging in agriculture, would have to injure the earth and the beings living in it, while ploughing (3:64; 10:82, 83-84). If this is the case, it may be asked how brahmans came to be such a moneyed and landed class, which they are even now for the most part. Some of Manu's ordinances indicate the direction in which an answer may be sought. Manu exhorts the king to give liberally to learned Brāhmaṇas: "The king shall offer various (śrauta) sacrifices at which liberal fees are distributed, and in order to acquire merit, he shall give Brāhmaṇas enjoyments and wealth" (7:79; cf. also vv 37-38). A gift made to a brahman is never lost (vv. 82-83). Indeed, it is better than agnihotra, the sacrifice to the god of fire (v. 85). "An offering made through the mouth-fire of Brāhmaṇas rich in sacred learning and austerities, saves from misfortune and from great guilt" (3:98), while "a Brāhmaṇa who stays unhonoured (in the house) takes away (with him) all the spiritual merit" of the householder (v. 100). Honouring the brahman is said to be one of the best

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16. There have, of course, been brahmans who were actually poor or who chose to live a poor and simple life. Nevertheless, it is doubtful if the principle, "The higher the man, the fewer are his rights and the more numerous his duties" is applicable to the brahman of history or of the Dharmaśāstras. S. Radhakrishnan's application of it to brahmans seems to derive from apologetic interests. Cf. *The Hindu View of Life*, London, 1971 (1927), 84.



means for a king to secure happiness (7:88). The knowledge-governing interest of these statements is evident. Equally obvious is the effect it would have on pious souls. History bears witness to the importance Indian princes and aristocracy attached to brahmadāna, the bestowing of gifts on brahmans in the form of gold and landed property. Manu ordains that "on failure of all (heirs) Brāhmaṇas shall share the estate" (9:188), while "the property of a Brāhmaṇa may never be taken by the king"; he may do this only in the case of the other castes (v. 189). The brahman may take an article necessary for the completion of a sacrifice from a vaiśya (11:11-12), he "may take at pleasure two or three articles (required for the sacrifice) from the house of a Sūdra; for a Sūdra has no business with sacrifices" (v. 13). But Manu is careful to warn that this may be done only under a "righteous king" (v. 11). And he advises the "righteous king" not to inflict punishment on the brahman for doing so, "for (in that case) the Brāhmaṇa pines with hunger through the Kṣatriya's want of care." (v. 21). The kṣatriya, on the contrary, must never take the property of a brahman; when starving, he may take the property of a dāsyu, or of one who neglects his sacred duties (v. 18).

In the same way, brahmans are to be exempted from punishments which ordinary mortals are liable to. His dignity immunizes him against all capital punishment. "No greater crime is known on earth than slaying a Brāhmaṇa; a king must not even conceive in his mind the thought of killing a Brāhmaṇa" (8:389). Whatever crimes he may have committed, he may only be banished from the kingdom, and that "leaving all his property (to him) and his body (unhurt)" (v. 380). Based as it is on the fundamental inequality of men, the caste-based laws are to be applied differently to different jātis and varṇas. It is only after the British introduced their laws in India that the fundamental equality of all in civil matters was at least theoretically admitted. While the killing of a brahman constituted a severe offence, mahāpātaka, the killing of a vaiśya or śūdra was a minor offence, upapātaka (9:235; 11:55 and 11:67). This is the case with giving pain to a brahman by a blow; as a minor offence, it was to cause the less of caste, jātibhramśa (11:68). To be sure, the mahāpātaka demanded more severe penances after death than the upapātaka. The slayer of a brahman will have to enter the womb of a dog, a pig, a candāla, a pukkaṣa, etc. (12:55). "A twice-born man who has merely threatened a Brāhmaṇa with the intention of (doing him) corporal injury, will wander about a hundred years in the Tamisra hell" (4:165). The intentional striking of a brahman even with a blade of grass will have to be atoned for by passing through twenty one existences (v. 166; cf. w. 167-169).



It is natural that a community of men endowed with such divine and human prerogatives despise and exclude the others. Manu draws long lists of those to be despised and excluded by the twice-born, especially the brahman. Numerous professions, not to speak of ordinary labour, are qualified as impure, and those engaging in them are condemned to be outcastes (3:155-166). The twice-born are advised to avoid these, lest they should themselves be reduced to the category of outcastes and condemned to despicable births afterwards. Even the other two categories of the twice-born, i. e., kṣatriyas and vaiśyas, are not pure or noble enough for the brahman. He may not treat the kṣatriya visiting him as a guest, atithi, and may feed him only after the guests proper, i. e., brahmans have eaten (3:110-111). If a vaiśya or śūdra is on visit, the brahman may feed him only with his servants, "showing (thereby) his compassionate disposition" (v. 112).

If this is the case with kṣatriyas and vaiśyas on whose protection and patronage the brahman's well-being largely depended, the condition of the śūdra can be imagined. Born of the deity's feet, the śūdra is in Manu's view a slave or domestic servant of the twice-born, especially the brahman. "One occupation only the lord prescribed to the Sūdra, to serve meekly even these (other) three castes." (1:91). "But let a (Sūdra) serve Brāhmaṇas, either for the sake of heaven, or with a view to both (this life and the next); for he who is called the servant of a Brāhmaṇa thereby gains all his ends. The service of Brāhmaṇas alone is declared (to be) an excellent occupation for a Sūdra; for whatever else besides this he may perform will bear him no fruit" (10:122-123). The king is asked to order the śūdra to serve the brahman (8:410). "But a Sūdra whether bought or unbought he (Brāhmaṇa) may compel to do servile work; for he was created by the Self-existent (Svayambhū) to be the slave of a Brāhmaṇa" (v.413). Manu cannot even imagine how a śūdra can be free: "A Sūdra, though emancipated by his master, is not released from servitude; since that is innate to him, who can set him free from it?" (v. 414). In another place, the interest behind this emphasis on the servile nature of the śūdra is somewhat naively admitted: "No collection of wealth must be made by a Sūdra even though he may be able (to do it); for a Sūdra who has acquired wealth gives pain to Brāhmaṇas" (10:129).

In contrast to the other three varṇas, the śūdra is not entitled to the sacred initiation, he has to be satisfied with "one birth" (10:4). Besides, the śūdra is forbidden to study the



Veda (3: 156; 4: 99; 10: 127),<sup>17</sup> and he is not to be instructed by the brahman (4: 80). "For he who explains the sacred law (to a Sūdra) or dictates to him a penance, will sink with that (man) into the hell (called) Asamvṛta." (v. 81) Indeed, the sūdra is so low that "he cannot commit an offence, causing the loss of caste (pātaka), and he is not worthy to receive the sacraments; he has no right to (fulfil) the sacred law (of the Aryans, yet) there is no prohibition against (his fulfilling certain portions of) the law" (10: 126). Even a brahman who has nothing but his name may interpret the law to the king, "but never a sūdra" (8: 20; cf. also v. 21). Manu even contends that the presence of many sūdras is enough to destroy a kingdom (v. 22). However inhuman and servile his duties may be, the sūdra is bound to fulfil them, as he is created by God for that purpose and as disobedience will mean punishment in the next birth(s). Manu says that the sūdra neglecting his duty will be reborn as a ghost feeding on moths (8: 414).

The inhumanity of the caste system is most evident in the treatment meted out to those sections of the population the upper classes call outcastes, avarṇas.<sup>18</sup> Manu defines them as "those tribes in this world, which are excluded from (the community of) those born from the mouth, the arms, the thighs, and the feet of (Brahman)." (10: 45). The fact that "they are called Dāsyaṣ" and are said to speak either the language of the mlecchas or that of the Aryans (ibid.) seems to point to racial differences that might have been, at least partly, responsible for their segregation. However, it is not likely that all these communities are the result of mixed marriages between the different castes, varṇas, or between these castes and those outside, as Manu contends (10: 7-49). Whatever that may be, they are all "base-born", apasada, subsist by and are *enjoined to* "subsist by occupations reprehended by the twice-born" (10: 46). And these groups include not only butchers and fishers and cobblers, but also carpenters, drummers, horse-breeders and chariot-makers (vv. 46-49). They are to live near well-known trees, burial grounds and on mountains (v. 50). What makes their lot all the more miserable is the fact that they are not only de facto dependent

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17. Radhakrishnan finds a justification for this. Cf. op. cit., 86: "Upanayana or initiation ceremony and Vedic study were denied to them (i. e., the sūdras). Society was perhaps anxious to preserve its usefull members from losing their heads over them. Saving knowledge can be gained apart from Vedic study and rights (sic)".

18. Cf. Hutton, op. cit.; Ghurye, *Caste and Class in India*, Bombay, 1950; J. Arakkal, art. cit.



on socially despised occupations but are *bound to continue being so* by the caste ideology (10: 46).<sup>19</sup> Candālas are to live outside the village, the vessels they use are impure, and their only wealth shall be dogs and donkeys (v. 51). Further "their dress (shall be) the garments of the dead, (they shall eat) their food from broken dishes, black iron (shall be) their ornaments, and they must always wander from place to place" (v. 52). The authors of these regulations – if not also their "practitioners" seems to have had a measure of sadistic pleasure in condemning other human beings to such inhuman living conditions.

In the eyes of the well-to-do, the poor and depressed sections are often also morally depraved. The way Manu describes an impure outcaste shows how the depressed classes are stigmatized; "Behaviour unworthy of an Aryan, harshness, cruelty, and habitual neglect of duties betray in this world a man of impure origin" (10: 58). It would seem that the presence or absence of these vices is all a matter of birth, whether one is born of brahman or candāla parents. The baseborn candālas and pukkasas are so polluting that the twiceborn are asked to avoid them by all means. In case a brahman happens to touch a candāla, he is to purify himself by means of a bath (5: 85). Indeed a brahman approaching a candāla or a very low caste woman, or eats with such persons, will become himself an outcast (11: 176). And infringing caste regulations meant, as we have seen, also other-wordly sanctions in the form of despicable births and rebirths. The only way to beatitude open to the outcasts is to die "without the expectation of a reward, for the sake of Brāhmaṇas and cows, or in defence of women and children" (10: 62).

It may not be said that all of Manu's prescriptions and prohibitions are meant to safeguard the interests of those higher up in socio-religious hierarchy. They are not.<sup>20</sup> But a good

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19. However, there have been exceptions to this rule. Indian history knows instances of a certain upward mobility, especially as far as groups are concerned. A community could claim for itself a superior position in the caste hierarchy, by adopting the customs and practices of a higher caste, sometimes also a new name and an eponymous ancestor. As a result of these measures, termed 'sanskritization' by M. N. Srinivas, a lower caste could upgrade itself in the course of time, provided, of course, it could back its claims by economic or political power.

20. It should be pointed out that Manu contains a few passages that relativize or contradict the ideologically discriminative statements considered above. For example, speaking of the duties



many of them seem to serve the purpose, and quite a few statements betray an explicit interest in legitimizing the status quo. This is all the more evident in view of the fact that the twice-born, especially the brahmins, were for the most part responsible for both the making and interpretation of the laws of dharma. We have seen how Manu enjoins that the law be interpreted by brahmins, and not by śūdras. On doubtful points of the law, what good brahmins, śiṣṭas, propound is to have legal force, and good brahmins are those who have studied the Vedas and can adduce convincing proofs "from the revealed texts" (12: 108-109). In this perspective, it is natural that the brahmins interpret the law in such a way as to protect and legitimize their rights and privileges.<sup>21</sup> That the underprivileged had no right, on grounds of faith, to study the law or the scriptures, let alone interpret them, made it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the others to criticize or challenge the brahmin's interpretations. True, some of Manu's extreme claims may be the expression of wishful-thinking rather than of reality. For instance, the śūdras were not everywhere forced to serve the brahmin, as Manu ordains; on the contrary, there have been instances where the brahmin had to depend on the śūdra. Yet, much of what Manu says reflected the social and political reality of India's life till recent times.<sup>22</sup> There is no denying the religious "apartheid" that caste fostered and the opportunities it gave to the upper classes to oppress and exploit the masses of the working population in the name of God and dharma. We may not say this was made possible solely or mainly by the ideology of varnāśrama-dharma. But there can be no doubt that it has helped to cement and perpetuate the divisions and differences arising from a complex

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of the student, Manu says: "He who possesses faith may receive pure learning even from a man of lower caste, the highest law even from the lowest, and an excellent wife even from a base family" (2: 238). Apart from its tacit acceptance of the division of people into high and low, this text is remarkable for its openness. But such universalism is not typical of Manusmṛti; its main thrust is, as we have seen, conservative and system-stabilizing. Cf. however for a more positive view of Manu, T. M. Manickam, "The Image of Man in the Hindu Dharmaśāstras", in *Jeevadhara*, No. 23, Sept. - Oct. 1974, 401-411.

21. This is, of course, not without its parallels in other religions. It would be fruitful, for instance, to compare Manu's defence of the rights and privileges of brahmins with the defence of clerical privileges in Church law, say in the Catholic *Codex juris canonici*.

22. Hutton, *op. cit.*; Ghurye, *op. cit.*



of economic, political, racial, cultural and geographical factors.<sup>23</sup> It gave the subjugation and exploitation of the poor and weak by those who came to wield power and influence the cover of respectability. Indeed, it provided a basically inhuman situation, a cosmic or divine legitimation so that the privileged classes could enjoy their privileges without the prick of conscience and the underprivileged could accept their suffering and servitude as something inevitable. In fact the caste is even now a determining factor in India's social and political life.<sup>24</sup> This makes the uncovering and criticism of the caste ideology a necessary step on the way to the all round emancipation of India's masses. But this is only a step, and no more than that. For emancipation has now to be above all economic, and this would require a politics of development meant *for all* as well as the elimination of oppressive and exploitative structures. It would be impossible to achieve this end without the organized action, especially of the sufferers themselves, cutting across the traditional barriers of religion and community. In this process, the criticism of enslaving ideologies, whether religious, cultural or social will form part of a theory of the *new* man to be realized by emancipatory praxis.

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23. This seems clear in view of the discriminative legislation on Manusmṛti and the authority it enjoyed in a society where religion and politics were so closely bound to each other. However, there need to be historical and sociological studies to determine the way Manu and the other Dharmaśāstras influenced the life and thinking of the people as well as civil legislation in different parts of India.

24. Cf. M. N. Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and other Essays*, Bombay, 1962; T. Zinkin, *Caste Today*, 1962; E. R. Leach (ed.), *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North-West Pakistan* 1960; G. M. Carstairs, *The Twice Born*. 1958.



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# Editorial

Since man's economic liberation is a problem that affects the third (or rather the fourth) world, a study of the biblical teaching on the subject will certainly be in place. "Gospel and Liberation" has been the theme of numerous studies that have appeared recently both in India and abroad. Special reference must here be made to Fr. G. Koonthanam's paper on the relevance of the social message of the prophets (cf. *Biblehashyam*, vol. I/3[1975]); Fr. L. Legrand has approached the problem in the light of the concept of God's kingdom (cf. "God's Kingdom and Liberation", *The Living Word* 79[1973] pp. 311-25). It is our hope that the current number of *Jeevadhara* will in its own modest way contribute to the readers' conscientization.

The law codes of ancient Israel include several provisions meant to afford economic security to the lower strata of society; this facet of biblical law is studied by Jacob Chamakala. The prophets of Israel were the champions of the down-trodden and the under-privileged in the community of God's people, and their message is the subject of the contribution by K. J. Varghese. Jesus was neither a politician nor a labour leader, and his mission here on earth was not to create conditions which will allow men to enjoy economic security, but nonetheless in his preaching he emphasized the need of daily bread. This aspect of his message is discussed by Thomas Jacob. The early Church made an experiment with the "communist" way of life, based of course, on love and not on class hatred. However, on finding the project impractical, she abandoned it: this historical experience is analysed by George Soares-Prabhu. Incidentally, it was George himself who suggested the theme of the present issue. Some of the non biblical traditions of antiquity are the subject of the remaining two contributions.

Many a reader will note that we have not included an *ex professo* Indological study in this number. The reason is that the sacred books of India, composed as they were by men who enjoyed perfect economic security, do not at all dwell upon pro-



blems that affect the poor man, such as social justice and equitable distribution of wealth. It is true some of the sacred books insist upon the need to show kindness to the poor, etc., but all such considerations are alien to, say, the Upaniṣads. The German Indologist Walter Ruben (who is a Marxist) has argued that the great epics represent a reaction of the proletarian masses against a crafty priesthood's centuries-long exploitation (cf. his essay, "Vier Liebestra-gödien des Rāmāyaṇa", *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenlandischen Gesellschaft* 100[1950] pp. 287-355; cf. too his monograph, *Die gesellschaftliche Entwicklung im alten Indien*. Bd. I. *Die Entwicklung der Produktionsverhältnisse im alten Indien* [Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften, Institut für Orientalforschung, Veröffentlichung Nr. 67/I, Berlin, 1967]), but as this seems to be a biased understanding of the sources, no special article has been devoted to it. The Avesta regards the endeavour to attain economic well-being as a religious duty, and condemns poverty. To Zarathushtra's question about the essence of Mazdāhean religion, Ahura Mazdāh, "the Wise Lord", replies: "It is sowing corn... He who sows corn sows holiness: he makes the law of Mazdāh grow higher and higher: he makes the law of Mazdāh as fat as he can with a hundred acts of adoration, a thousand oblations, ten thousand sacrifices..." (Vid. 3:30ff.). The Avesta also inculcates almsgiving, etc., but since it does not embody a social message comparable to that of the Hebrew prophets, any reference to it becomes unnecessary.

The suggestion has been made that an article on the idea of social economy in Kautilya's Arthaśāstra be included in this number, but it has not been found feasible for two reasons: first, the Arthaśāstra has never been regarded as a sacred book of Hinduism; second, accounts of the social teaching it embodies are available in any advanced history of India, which cannot unfortunately be said of Mazdakism, the special views of Georges Dumézil, etc.

The biblical message is that economic liberation is an integral part of man's total liberation effected by God in and through Christ. As a matter of fact, God grants the petition for "daily bread" in order that the believer may be able to pray, "Hallowed be thy name!"



# Economic Liberation according to Biblical Law

Ancient Israelite law, despite its marked insistence on ritual purity and cult, was quite concerned about the individual's economic and material well-being. In fact there are in the OT stipulations, exhortations, injunctions etc. which aim at providing the average man with economic security, and what every Israelite longed for was to sit under his vine and fig tree and eat their fruits in safety without fear or anxiety (Mic. 4: 4; 1 Kg. 4: 25 etc.). This economic ideal comes to expression in the following prayer uttered by an anonymous sage:

“... Give me neither proverty nor riches,  
grant me only my share of bread to eat...”  
(Prv. 30: 7-9)

If he is surrounded by plenty there is the possibility that he may utter blasphemies, but on the other hand if he is too poor he may steal and profane the name of God. Economic security is therefore necessary for man's total commitment to Yahweh, and biblical law makes provision for it. The present study has as its purpose a survey of the legal sections of the OT that aim at man's economic liberation.

## Biblical Law, its Nature

Though the term *tôrāh* means “teaching, doctrine”, etc. collectively it denotes the whole corpus of laws governing man's relations with God and his neighbour. In common use *tôrāh* means the Pentateuch, which comprises several legislative traditions; viz. the Code of the Covenant, Deuteronomy, the Law of Holiness and the Priestly Code. Our study confines itself mostly to the first two traditions.

The Code of the Covenant (Ex. 20: 22-23: 33) is a comopsite collection, in which one can easily distinguish a central portion (Ex. 21: 1-22: 16) where “sentences” or “judgements” (*mishpatîm*)



of civil and criminal law are grouped together. It is characteristically a law for a community of shepherds and peasants, as evinced by the directives about slaves, cattle, fields, vineyards, etc. We do not know the exact date of origin of the code, though it is beyond doubt that it was in force in the early days of the settlement in Canaan. The Deuteronomic Code (chps. 12-26) includes citations from the Code of the Covenant as well as modifications of its laws.<sup>1</sup> And scholars now generally believe that Deuteronomy is the "law" discovered in the temple during the reign of king Josiah (2 Kg. 22: 8f.).

There is a basic unity among the laws of the ancient world. The civil legislations of the OT, though having an originality of their own, are part of the culture of the ancient Orient. There is close connection between them and the Code of Hammurabi,<sup>2</sup> the Assyrian Laws,<sup>3</sup> and the Hittite Code;<sup>4</sup> it is not the result of direct borrowing but the outcome of a single widespread customary law.<sup>5</sup>

OT laws fall into two groups according to their style.<sup>6</sup> On the one hand there are laws in the casuistic form, with the conjunction "if" (or, "supposing that" introducing a typical case and then giving the solution; on the other hand there are laws in the apodictic form which lay down commands or prohibitions in the second person. The casuistic form is chiefly used for secular laws and the apodictic one for cultic legislation.<sup>7</sup> We may also recall here that the Israelite codes resemble most the

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1. Cf. S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy* (The International Critical Commentary, repr., Edinburgh, 1951) pp. iii-xiv.

2. English translation in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, 1956; abbr. *ANET*) pp. 163-80.

3. *ANET*, pp. 180-88.

4. *ANET*, pp. 188-97.

5. Thus R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (London, 1962) p. 146.

6. Cf. A. Alt, "The Origins of Israelite Law," *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (New York, 1967) pp. 101-71.

7. The view has been expressed that casuistic laws were direct borrowing from Canaanite legislation, while the apodictic ones the creations of the Israelites themselves. However, no



Hittite vassal treaties which contain clauses introduced by "if" as well as injunctions or imperative statements.<sup>8</sup>

The most striking characteristic of biblical law is the connection between legal provisions and religion, and the motive for observing the *tôrāh* is ultimately Yahweh's love for Israel. It is further distinguished from the eastern codes (even from the Hittite one which was most lenient)<sup>9</sup> by the humaneness of its sentences. Bodily mutilation is exacted only in one case (Dt. 25: 11f.), which the Assyrian law too punishes in the same way.<sup>10</sup> Flogging is limited to forty strokes "lest the bruises be dangerous and your brother be degraded" (Dt. 25: 3). Kindness to birds too is inculcated (Dt. 22: 6f.).

## Economic Laws in Specie

### 1. Regulations regarding land

In Egypt land belonged either to the Pharaoh or to the temples, and there is no mention of anybody else possessing land. In Mesopotamia, however, though the temples and rulers owned large estates, the oldest texts show that communities, families and individuals too had their own private property, which the king could

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Canaanite codes are extant to prove this theory. Mesopotamian codes contain laws formulated in casuistic form, but not in the apodictic style, though Israelite law certainly resembles them in the casuistic formulation (de Vaux, *op. cit.*, p. 147).

8. Compare the following passage from the treaty between Shuppiluliumash the Hittite emperor (14th cent. B. C.) and his vassal Aziras king of the state of Amurru in Syria-Palestine: "And if you, Aziras, protect' the king of the Hatti land, your master will 'protect' you in the same way." Now there follows an apodictic statement: "The way you 'protect' your own soul, . . . and your own land, 'protect' the soul of the king. . . ." (*ANETS Supplement*, p. 529).

9. On this point, cf. O. R. Gurney, *The Hittites* (Penguin Books, Baltimore, 1966) pp. 94-99.

10. Cf. de Vaux, *op. cit.*, p. 149. The whole thing seems to be a "symbolic retaliation" (*ibid.*, p. 159).



acquire only by purchase from the owners. Kings used to found fiefs, i. e., a grant of immovable property made to an individual in return for the rendering of services. The Code of Hammurabi devotes several articles to this,<sup>11</sup> and it is frequently alluded to in the Nuzi and Ugaritic documents.<sup>12</sup> Gradually the fief took on the character of immovable property, which a man could freely dispose of, and the obligations remained attached to the property, and not to any person.

This development of the fief was far advanced when Israel appeared on the scene of history. Nevertheless the feudal idea, though transferred to the theological plane, was in force among them: as Yahweh was the only king of Israel (Jdg. 8:23), he was also the sole lord of the soil. Just as in the second millennium B. C. at Nuzi and in Assyria, the fiefs were distributed by drawing lots, in the same way the Promised Land was distributed among the tribes (Jos. 13:6)<sup>13</sup>. Communal property, whose temporal use was divided among a number of families, is far less in evidence than family property, which, it seems, was the normal system in Israel. The ancestral estate often contained the family tomb (Jos. 24:30, 32; I Sam. 25:1 etc.). The peasant was deeply attached to the plot he had inherited from his fathers, and his right was safeguarded by law. Naboth, for example, refused to surrender his vineyard to king Ahab, and the latter could not force him to do so (1 Kg. 21).

The family property was well defined by boundaries which it was strictly forbidden to remove. Of course, displacement of landmarks was common crime in ancient Israel, and it was condemned by the prophets (Hos. 5:10; Prv. 22:28; Job 24:2 etc.).<sup>14</sup> This was a form of encroachment which made it impossible for every man to live under his fig tree!

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11. Cf. H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness that Was Babylon* (Mentor Books, New York, 1968) pp. 206-8.

12. Discussions in Saggs, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

13. Historically speaking this is a theological reinterpretation of the fact of the conquest of Palestine: the area occupied by the particular group is its own God-given territory.

14. This was forbidden by Greek and Roman law; the latter even allowed those who moved the boundaries to be put to death,



Although we speak of family property, we possess no evidence of the family having had community of property in the sense that all the members of the family had equal rights to a certain plot of land. A community of this kind would have been very peculiar, considering the character of the Israelite family, with its authority resting in the father. Those who belonged to his house had a share in the property to the extent that they were his kith and kin. True, the wife could own private property which she had brought from her kindred, but the fundamental point of view was that she shared in her husband's possession (Gen. 31 : 16). Property was bound up in the man, i. e., it was part of the household.

## 2. Inheritance

On the father's death property normally passed on to the eldest son, he being the heir in the strict sense. In Deuteronomy there are laws which allot two-thirds of the inheritance to the first-born (21 : 15 ff.). The children of slavewomen were not on the same level as those of freeborn wives. Nevertheless if there were no other children than those of the slave women, they could get the inheritance (Gen. 15 : 3). In the Priestly Code it was stipulated that when a man died without male issue, his daughters could inherit the property (Num. 27 : 8-11).

The levirate law<sup>15</sup> was meant to safeguard property rights: it imposed on the brother of the deceased who had died without issue the duty of raising up sons for him and thus to maintain his name in Israel. The evident purpose of the law was to perpetuate a family, but it also served to keep a family's property from alienation. We do not know how far this law used to be observed in Israel, but refusal to fulfil it was considered a sin against love, and the offender had to be publicly humiliated. The widow was supposed to take off his shoe and spit on his face, because "he does not raise up his brother's house" (Dt. 25 : 5-10).

Sometimes an Israelite was obliged to sell his patrimony because of poverty. In this case one of his near relatives had

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15. That is, the law regarding the *levir*, which is a Latin word meaning "brother-in-law."



to redeem the land and the one who did it was known as *gō'el*.<sup>16</sup> Jeremiah bought the field of his cousin Hanameel (32: 6-9), and Boaz, in place of the nearest *gō'el* bought the property of Elimelek (Ruth 4: 6). The purpose of this custom was to keep for the kinsfolk the property which the head of a family was not able to retain for himself. In any case there is no question of the repurchase of a property already sold, nor is the land restored to the impoverished kinsman.

The economic growth of the first centuries of the monarchy hastened the break-up of the family property in favour of the rich. Alienation of ancestral property, and exploitation by the landlords who used to lend money at exorbitant interest (Dt. 23: 21 Ps. 15: 5. Prv. 28: 8 etc.), led to the growth of pauperism and the enslavement of defaulting debtors or their dependents. Regulations regarding the sabbatical year and the year of jubilee came as an attempt to remedy these evils.<sup>17</sup>

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16. This is an active participle of the root *gā'al*, "to lay claim to a person or thing, claim back a person or thing from another's authority or possession," and hence also "to redeem". The word has reference to family and civil law.

17. Lev. 25 deals with the sabbatical and jubilee years: every seventh year the land should have rest (cf. Ex. 23: 10f.), and after every "seven weeks of years" (i. e., in the fiftieth year) there was to be a general emancipation; the fields were to lie fallow and everyone could re-enter his ancestral property. Religious grounds are given for these provisions; the land cannot be sold absolutely since it belongs to Yahweh; Israelites cannot be cast into perpetual slavery, for they are the servants of the Lord who has brought them out of Egypt. Although the cycle of seven years occurs in the Bible (Gen. 41: 25-36; Dan. 9: 24-27) no exact parallel is found to the law regarding the sabbatical year, nor is there any evidence that the jubilee year was ever observed. Both the laws therefore seem to have been representative of an ideal of social justice and equality which was never realized. Even though the two laws were truly Utopian, they nevertheless point to the care the lawgivers had for the safeguarding of the rights of the poor and the needy.



### 3. Laws regarding slaves

Slave traffic was general in the ancient East, and Israel was not an exception. Throughout antiquity war was one of the means of obtaining slaves. In general, though slaves were considered "the master's money" Israelite law laid down certain rules to safeguard their position in the family and their rights. Dt. 20: 10-18 deals with the conquest of towns: if a town stood in the territory Yahweh had assigned to his people, it had to be utterly destroyed and no living thing left in it, but if it was outside Israelite territory and it surrendered, the whole population was condemned to forced labour. If it refuses and is then captured, all the males are to be put to death, and women and children are to be reckoned as booty.

The master could make use of a slave as he willed, and he had the right to sell him. Although the Rabbis allowed a slave to be branded in order to discourage him from running away, there is no evidence of the practice in the Bible. A slave who declined to be freed had his ears pierced (Ex. 21: 6; Dt. 15: 17), but this was not a brand inflicted on him. It was rather a symbol of his attachment to the family. A man who blinded his slave or broke his tooth was bound to set him free in compensation (Ex. 21: 26 f.). If a man beat his slave to death, he was to be punished (Ex. 21: 20), but if the slave survived for one or two days the master was exonerated, for it was "his money" that was at stake. A female prisoner whom an Israelite had married might be divorced but not sold in slavery (Dt. 21: 10-14).

From the practical point of view the life of a slave depended upon the character of his master. In Israel slaves formed part of the household and hence they had to be circumcised (Gen. 17: 12f. ). They joined in the family worship, rested on the Sabbath (Ex. 20: 10; 23: 12), shared in the sacrificial meals (Dt. 12: 12, 18) and took part in the feasts (Dt. 16: 11, 14), including too the Passover (Ex. 12: 44), from which the visitor and the wage-earner were excluded. In ancient Israel, which attached so much importance to the family, the life of a slave might usually have been at least tolerable. A priest's slave could eat of the holy offerings (Lev. 22: 10). Abraham's relations with his slave show how intimate the lord and servant can be (Gen. 24 passim). According



to the sages, "Better (is) a shrewd servant than a degenerate son" (Prv. 17:2). In the absence of heirs the slave could inherit the master's property (Gen. 15:3). Religious motives too were suggested for the good treatment of slaves: they were God's creatures (Job 31:15).

Although the codes allowed the Israelites to buy as slaves men and women of foreign origin or born of resident aliens (Ex. 12:44; Lev. 22:11; 25:44), it was forbidden to reduce any of the Hebrews to slavery (2Chr. 28:8-15). No one could exercise absolute power over his brethren (Lev. 25:46). An Israelite who sold himself to an alien could be redeemed by his kinsmen; he could also redeem himself, but he had to be treated with consideration (Lev. 25:47-53). Again, whether the master was an Israelite or foreigner, these slaves had to be set free in the jubilee year (Lev. 25:40).

Kindness to slaves was very much insisted upon. A slave who was an Israelite by birth had to be treated like a visitor or wage-earner, and was not made to do menial or hard jobs like ordinary slaves (Lev. 25:39 f.). Commenting on the text, the Rabbis laid down that he should not be given tasks which were too exacting or too degrading, like turning the mill (Jdg. 16:21): or taking off the master's shoes and washing his feet (1 Sam. 25, 41). Hence in the NT when John the Baptist protests that he is not worthy to untie the sandals of the one who is to come after him (Mt. 3:11), he means that he is less than a slave. Peter is shocked when Jesus wanted to wash his feet (John. 13:6 f.), for that is the work reserved for slaves of foreign origin.

#### 4. Respect for the rights of others

Israelite law enjoined that every man respect his neighbour, such as he was, in his totality. First of all his life had to be respected. He grew and developed in the family, and hence his family rights had to be respected. No one was permitted to violate the marriage covenant (Ex. 20:14; Lev. 20:10; Dt. 5:18; 22:22) or to steal one of his children (Dt. 24:7). One was not to covet his neighbour's house, wife, slave, ass or anything belonging to him (Ex. 20:17. Dt. 5:21). The totality of man himself - his life



had to be respected (Ex. 20: 15. Lev. 19: 11. Dt. 5: 19, 23: 25f.). In the three pithy phrases

*lô' tiršah* ("Thou shalt not commit murder")

*lô' tin'āf* ("Thou shalt not commit adultery")

*lô' tignōb* ("Thou shalt not commit theft")

biblical law sums up the respect a person should show to his neighbour's rights. This principle is maintained in daily life (Lev. 19: 35 f; 25: 14, 17) and even when conflicts arose (Ex. 23: 1-3, 6-8 etc.).

The same keen sense of right and justice prompted the lawgiver to lay down norms regarding restoration of lost animals and objects: "You shall not see your brother's ox or his sheep go astray, and withhold your help from them; you shall take them back to your brother. And if he is not near you, or you do not know him, you shall bring it home to your house, and it shall be with you until your brother seeks it; then you shall restore it to him. And so you shall do with his ass; so you shall do with his garment; so you shall do with any lost thing of your neighbour" (Dt. 22: 1-4). The same ordinance is found in Ex. 23: 4f., where it applies also to the cattle of the believer's enemy.

The rights even of aliens had to be respected: "You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner but you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this" (Dt. 24: 17f.). Considerations of the historical order were to prompt the Israelite to do good to the resident aliens in their midst.

The poor labourer had his rights which had always to be respected. The landless labourer has ever been the prime target of injustice, and, conscious of this fact, the Israelite lawgiver laid down the command not to curtail the rights of the hired worker. The original humanitarian motive was brought into the sphere of religion by the injunction that the worker should not be obliged to appeal to God against his oppressor. His wages were not to be withheld from him when he had finished his work; rather they were to be paid to him regularly at the end of the day (Dt. 24: 15). Further even those servants who were only sojourners were to be given their rights: "You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is



one of your brethréen or one of the sojourners who are in your land within your towns" (Dt. 24: 14).

### 5. Prohibition of usury

When an Israelite fell on hard times and was reduced to borrowing, his clan or tribe had to come to his rescue. The OT praises lending to the poor as a good deed (Ps. 37: 21; 112: 5; Sir. 29: 1 f.), but it concerns only loans without interest,<sup>18</sup> the only kind of loan allowed by the Code of the Covenant (Ex. 22: 24). The legislator had in mind only loans between Israelites. Later on, though lending at interest to foreigners was allowed doing this to "one's brother" was strictly forbidden: "You shall not lend upon interest to your brother, interest on money... victuals... on anything that is lent for interest. To a foreigner you may lend upon interest, but to your brother you shall not lend upon interest" (Dt. 23: 19 f.).

Even when lent at no interest, the poor borrower was to be treated kindly, and pledges should not be exacted: "When you make your neighbour a loan of any sort, you shall not go into his house to fetch his pledge. You shall stand outside and the man to whom you make the loan shall bring the pledge out to you. And if he is a poor man, you shall not sleep in his pledge; when the sun goes down you shall restore to him the pledge that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you; and it shall be righteousness to you before the Lord your God" (Dt. 24: 10-13).<sup>19</sup>

### 6. Care for the poor

Israelite law, in general, tried its very best to inculcate mercy<sup>20</sup> towards the weak and the poor. In all the legislations

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18. The rate of interest in antiquity was very high, coming sometimes to 50% and even more!

19. The writer is thinking of the poor man's outer garment or cloak received as pledge (compare the long flowing robe worn by Arabs); at night it served for him as a blanket.

20. In Hebrew *hesed*, "steadfast love" (which is an attribute of Yahweh), and "kindness, benevolence" which a man shows to his neighbour; the term implies solidarity, mutual availability belonging together etc.



the chief concern was to show mercy to those of the same covenant: one should not curse a deaf man, nor put a stumbling-block before the blind (Lev. 19: 14). In particular, the weak people to be protected were the widow, the fatherless, the *gēr*, (plural *gērîm*), and the client<sup>21</sup>, in short, those members of the community who were without a family to uphold them or who had no rights of their own.

The Code of the Covenant forbade the Israelite to vex or oppress the *gēr*, the motive given being that the Hebrews were themselves *gērîm* in the land of Egypt. The lawgiver continues: "You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child." If anyone were to do it, they would cry to Yahweh, and he would hear their cry, his wrath would wax hot, and he would kill the offender, so that his wife would become a widow and his children fatherless (Dz. 22: 20-23).

In Dt. 24: 19ff one finds the greatest concern for the poor and needy, a passage which is unparalleled by any legislative code. The text deserves to be cited in full: "When you reap your harvest in your field, and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean it afterwards; it shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this" (cf. to Lev. 19: 9f; 23: 22).

## 7. Legislation regarding trees

To destroy wantonly the fruit trees belonging to the territory of a besieged city was a common practice with invading armies. It is often mentioned by Greek sources, and in 2 Kg. 3: 19-25 the Israelites invading Moab, on Elisha's command, "cut down every good tree." In Arab warfare the destruction of the foe's palm groves was a favourite exploit. It was also an Assy-

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21. Cf. J. Pedersen, *Israel, Its Life and Culture* I-II (Copenhagen, 1953) p. 44.



rian custom to destroy the valuable trees in the area round about, especially the date-palms.<sup>22</sup>

The Hebrew legislators found this most inhuman, and forbade it. The Israelites, even though they had been besieging a city for a long time, were forbidden to destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them, but they could eat of the produce. The reason given in support of the injunction is quite interesting: "Are the trees in the field men that they should be besieged by you" (Dt. 20: 19)? Commenting on this passage Gerhard von Rad writes: "The fact that Deuteronomy contains in the context of its laws concerning war a rule to protect fruit-growing is probably unique in the history of the growth of a humane outlook in ancient times."<sup>23</sup> It is this humanistic element that has captured the minds of people every age.

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It is to the credit of ancient Hebrew law that it aimed at conscientiousness of man rather than at imposing hard and fast rules for practical living. This was done by preaching on the law, by insisting on sanctions, by affording the proper motivation, and by enforcing the legal provisions through courts. The Codes show the necessary connection between religion and morality.<sup>24</sup> But the great question still is: Did the lawgivers succeed in their endeavour? Yes, to a certain extent. Abuses there were, but Israelite law, with its humanistic and "socialistic" outlook, was certainly able to curb the innate tendency of man to exploit his neighbour, and in this sense it truly gave economic security to the poor and needy.

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22. Driver, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

23. Cf. his commentary, *Deuteronomy* (The Old Testament Library, London, 1969) p. 133.

24. On this point they are in full agreement with the prophets who condemn religion detached from morality.



# Israel's Prophets and Man's Economic Liberation

Liberation is a concept very much in vogue today and it has many sides. The common man understands it in terms of economics, whereas philosophy and theology take it in the sense of total deliverance. Economic liberation is part of this total deliverance, and in this paper it is intended to study the economic aspect of liberation as portrayed in the writings of some of the pre-exilic prophets of Israel. The prophets were God's spokesmen and often their sermons included indictments of social evils and exhortations to justice, charity, etc. They were protagonists of the lower strata of society, intent upon safeguarding the poor man's rights. It is impossible to study exhaustively their social message. The present analysis is therefore restricted to the biblical books *Amos*, *Hosea*, *Isaiah* of Jerusalem and *Micah*.

## I

Before the teaching of the prophets just mentioned is examined there should be a conspectus of the social background. Before her settlement in Palestine Israel was a nomadic group depending on nature and on Providence for her livelihood. The nomads had to share their food in common, for there was no means of preserving it. Nobody suffered acute want, and if there was a shortage of food, it affected all the members of the group. In the nomadic state of life theocracy reigned supreme among the Israelites, and this is the main reason why prophets refer to this period as the happiest time in Israel's history. After the conquest of Palestine the Israelites switched to the sedentary form of life. The result of this was the development of social classes, the distinction between the rich and the poor, and social evils like competition, exploitation, etc. Because of all this we find in some of the pre-Exilic prophets a hostility to the more advanced stage of civilization. Hosea and Jeremiah, for instance, regard the age in the wilderness as the ideal period in Israel's life (Hos. 2: 17; 11: 1. Jer. 2: 2; 3: 4). The French exegete A. Causse calls this "la nostalgie des



temps primitifs".<sup>1</sup> As a reaction to the social evils of the times groups like the Rechabites returned to the nomadic mode of life, and Jeremiah refers to their fidelity to it.<sup>2</sup>

The political situation of Israel and Judah in the mid-eighth century must be recalled here. The two states were at peace with each other, and the major trade routes that passed through their territories proved to be a source of economic boom. The splendid buildings and the costly ivory inlays of Phoenician or Damascene origin unearthed at Samaria show that Amos was not exaggerating when he described the luxury of Israel's upper classes.<sup>3</sup> Judah too was equally prosperous.

There is another side to the picture, a none too glamorous one. The worst forms of social injustice were prevalent in the two kingdoms (cf. part II), and paganism began to creep in and contaminate the cult of Yahweh. It is true that worship was carried on, on an elaborate scale, but it was something merely external and insincere. The clergy had become corrupt; they were time-servers concerned chiefly with their living, and the prophets were ready to trim their oracles to the size of the fee they received (Mic. 3: 5-8; 9-11).

At this juncture there arose men of conviction and courage to condemn the evils of the day and to recall Yahweh's will to the minds of their contemporaries. They spoke of a coming of

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1. Cited by J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia, 1967) p. 344 (cf. *ibid.*, n. 110).

2. Cf. Jer. 35: the Rechabites had fixed abodes, they were not engaged in sedentary occupations, and they used to abstain from wine. Their programme of life represents a radical break with the culture of the sedentary and urban sections of the Israelite nation.

3. Cf. J. Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia, 1959) p. 240; cf. too W. F. Albright, *Archaeology of Palestine* (Penguin Books, Baltimore, 1963) pp. 136 f. 1 Kg. 22: 39 refers to the "ivory house" that king Ahab (about 869-50) had built for himself in Samaria; the author of Ps. 45, as he refers to the playing of stringed instruments in "ivory palaces" (v. 8), may be having Ahab's palace in mind.



Yahweh, not as the people expected, through his mighty deeds as in the pests of Egypt but through their message of judgment. They rejected the idea that the covenant had bound Yahweh unconditionally for the future, and that religious obligations could be discharged through busy religiosity. They represented Yahweh as both accuser and judge who would take action against his rebellious people.<sup>4</sup>

The two kingdoms, though externally strong, prosperous and confident of the future, were inwardly rotten and sick past cure. This uneasy feeling was voiced in the northern kingdom of Israel by Amos and Hosea, and in the southern kingdom of Judah by Isaiah of Jerusalem and Micah.

## II

It is against the background of the social conditions outlined above that we have to view the message of the prophets. These spokesmen of God expose first of all the social evils of the times without human respect and condemn them outright. Amos gives a list of the evils prevalent in the northern kingdom: recklessness, conceit, procrastination, luxury, gluttony, enervation, drunkenness, hardness, and the like, which would finally lead to doom.<sup>5</sup> Let us study in some detail 6: 1-7 where Amos graphically describes the state of affairs in the north. There are people who "lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches" (v. 4a). The "beds of ivory" were beds inlaid with ivory, and this type of furniture is indicative of luxury and affluence. The affluent "eat lambs from the flock, and calves from the midst of the stall" (v. 4b). As they eat and drink, there is singing "to the sound of the harp," and Amos notes that they "like David<sup>6</sup> invent for themselves instruments of music" (v. 5). They "drink wine in bowls,<sup>7</sup> anoint themselves with the finest oils" (v. 6), and remain unaware of the tragedy that is going to befall them.

4. Bright, *op. cit.*, pp. 247f.

5. W.R. Harper, *Amos and Hosea* (The International Critical Commentary, Edinburgh, 1953) p. 141.

6. Here we have the earliest passage that speaks of David as a poet and musician (Harper, *op. cit.*, p. 148).

7. What is meant is special cups, larger in size than the ordinary ones, used on festive occasions.



A thing that aroused Amos's ire was the possession of summer and winter houses by the rich, houses which had furniture inlaid with ivory. He therefore says that Yahweh "will smite the winter house with the summer house: the house of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall come to an end" (3: 15). In the palatial dwellings of the capital city of Samaria there are women who are as wicked as their menfolk, and whom Amos calls (fat) "cows of Bashan." These women oppress the poor, crush the needy and ask their husbands: "Bring, that we may drink" (4: 1). What the prophet here means is that the husbands are forced to exploit the poor in order that they may procure the viands needed for their wives' orgies of eating and drinking.<sup>8</sup>

An equally traumatic picture of the northern kingdom is painted by Hosea: "There is no faithfulness or kindness, and no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds and murder follows murder" (4: 1f.). Swearing and lying mean perjury, and killing, stealing and committing adultery point to the violation of the sacred norms of covenant law.<sup>9</sup> People break into the house of their neighbour, and "murder follows murder," "literally, "blood striking blood,"<sup>10</sup> i. e., bloodshed.

Hosea accuses his contemporaries of having "ploughed iniquity;" they "have reaped injustice, . . . have eaten the fruit of lies" (10: 13a). The verbs "plough" and "reap" designate wickedness and injustice, the sinfulness of the people at large. The eating of the fruit of lies means that the end of their present policy—an end which is already in sight—will be utter disappointment.<sup>11</sup> The people enjoy a false sense of security, for they have their war chariots and a large army, a "multitude" of warriors (10: 13b). Confidence in their own military might, according to Hosea, is a sin against Yahweh, for it implies disregard of the God of the covenant.

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8. For an instance of women's role in social injustice, cf. n. 17 below.

9. In his enumeration of sins, Hosea shows himself to be acquainted with the decalogue.

10. Harper, *op. cit.*, pp. 249-51.

11. Harper, *op. cit.* p. 356.



The prophets of the south too are vocal in their condemnation of abuses. Isaiah of Jerusalem castigates the women of the city for their vanity, and the oracle in Is. 3 : 16-22 is the longest catalogue of feminine finery in the OT. The prophet observes how the women walk about, holding their heads high and glancing around wantonly. Their affected gait and ornaments are meant to attract men, but their wantonness will be their own undoing, for they will be violated by their captors.<sup>12</sup> It is not right to represent Amos and Isaiah as misogynists, for what they condemn is excessive luxury in which men and women of the higher strata of society were revelling.

Enjoyment of life often goes hand in hand with injustice and oppression, and trampling on the rights of others and exploitation. Amos notes how his contemporaries "turn justice to wormwood and cast down righteousness to the earth" (5 : 7). Wormwood is a bitter herb reckoned poisonous by the ancients.<sup>13</sup> By introducing this figure Amos means that instead of the sweetness of justice the bitterness of injustice is accorded to the poor. Righteousness in the text under consideration means civil justice: it is personified and represented as an individual who is thrown down and trampled under foot.<sup>14</sup> Any spokesman of God who protested against these abuses was hated by the rich (5 : 10) who "trample upon the poor and take from him exactions of wheat" (5 : 11). The exaction of wheat (grain) the prophet refers to must have been a burdensome and heavy tax forced from the poor peasants by the rich who owned the land. What they thus gained, they used to erect sumptuous houses for themselves.

Financial speculation, which is something unheard of in nomadic societies, was quite rampant in Israel (Amos 8 : 5f.).

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12. Such is the meaning of the threat. "The Lord will lay bare their secret parts" (v. 17). The tragedy that will befall the women will be brought about by Yahweh's own causality.

13. The translation "poison" may also be adapted. Cf. the rendering of the *New English Bible*, "You turn justice upside down."

14. In antiquity victors used to put their foot on the necks of the vanquished foes who were made to lie prostrate on the ground (cf. Jos. 10: 24. Ps. 110: 1).



The creditors waited for the New Moon and the Sabbath<sup>15</sup> to be over in order to sell grain. The day of the New Moon was celebrated as a religious festival, during which there was suspension of trade; on the Sabbath day too business transactions were suspended. The exploiters were eagerly waiting for the days of obligation to expire in order to resume their trade. They "make the ephah small and the shekel great,<sup>16</sup> and deal deceitfully with false balances". Like merchants all over the world, they want to supply the minimum quantity for the maximum possible price! This was something forbidden by Israelite law (Lev. 19:36. Dt. 25:14f.). The buying of "the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals" points to the custom of reducing to slavery the debtors who were insolvent. The selling of "the refuse of wheat" can only mean the sale of grain that, being of poor quality, will normally be discarded; perhaps the merchants adulterate the stuff they sell.

The abuses so far mentioned prevailed in the southern kingdom as well. Isaiah complains that Jerusalem, the city where righteousness lodged, had become a den of murderers: the rulers were rebels, in the sense that they did not follow the covenant law; they had become companions of thieves. Bribery had become a common practice, and anyone who in his capacity as ruler did some favour or other expected a gift in return for his service (1:21-23). Those who were expected to administer justice with perfect impartiality "acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right" (5:23). The defence of the widow and the orphan was a sacred duty of the rulers of Jerusalem, but "they do not defend the fatherless, and the widow's cause does not come to them" (1:23b).

Moreover the custodians of law and order, manipulated the law for their own advantage and even promulgated unjust laws. They "decree iniquitous decrees... and keep writing oppression" (10:1).

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15. The present passage embodies the earliest reference to the observance of the Sabbath, with cessation from work.

16. The ephah was a dry measure of capacity (20. 878 quarts); shekel was both a coin and weight. What Amos here means is the latter (and not the value of the coin, or the value a silver or gold piece weighing a shekel will have).



What Isaiah has in mind here is the extreme form of corruption in high places, and those who suffer most from it are the poor and needy, the widow and the fatherless. The dispensers of justice have at the end become the worst type of exploiters (10:2). To understand Isaiah's indictment of the ruling class in 10:1f. etc., we must remember that he was a native of Jerusalem and might even have been a member of the aristocracy. At any rate he had free access to the courts and was able to chide the rulers of Judah, but all this meant that he had first-hand knowledge of all that was going on in the higher escheleons of Judaeen society.

The rich who were accustomed to mock God (5:18 f.), were morally depraved and (5:20), puffed up with pride (5:21) and used to engage in orgies of drunkenness (5:11f.22). They were also ruthless exploiters of the poor. They used to "join house to house" and "add field to field" until there was no room for anybody else - particularly for the poor - in the land. At the end they "dwell alone in the midst of the land" (5:8). The poor man who had become a debtor to them, who had mortgaged his property to them, was ousted from the tiny plot of land he had inherited from his fathers; he lost everything that he had, and he was reduced to the condition of a beggar or slave. For Isaiah this was a most heinous crime, and he loudly protested against it.

The prophet Micah is in full agreement with Isaiah of Jerusalem on the moral corruption and injustice prevalent in the southern kingdom. He laments that all good men have perished from the earth and that there is no one who is upright. Men "lie in wait for blood, and each hunts his brother with a net" (7:2). The princes and the judges invariably asked for a bribe; without it they will not pay heed to those who had recourse to them. They also connived with the rich (7:3), so that the prophet could not help lamenting: "The best of them is like a briar, and the most upright of them a thorn hedge" (7:4). Because of the prevalence of dishonesty people do not trust each other (7:5), and even in family circles the relations are not cordial: "The son treats his father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother..." (7:6).

Micah was a witness of the injustice done by the wealthy landowners. They "devise wickedness and work evil upon their



beds" (2:1). No doubt the reference here is to what we would call, in modern terminology, speculation. What they secretly plan they carefully execute to their own advantage, for they have the power to do what they want. "They covet fields, and seize them; and houses, and take them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance" (2:2).<sup>17</sup> Micah even goes to the extent of comparing the exploiters to a hostile army that is engaged in looting and plundering (2:8). They even strip the poor man of his robe, which was something strictly forbidden (Dt. 24:12f.). The robe in question here is the large and loose outer garment worn by the Israelites. The poor had but one such robe, which they also used for covering themselves at night.<sup>18</sup>

### III

Exposing the corruption prevalent among their contemporaries, and unmasking those who were guilty of social injustice, formed an integral part of the preaching of the prophets. But their work as God's spokesmen did not stop there. They go on to describe the terrible calamities that will befall the perpetrators of injustice. The punishment God has in store for them includes the denial of fertility to the land: "For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield but an ephah" (Is. 5:10)<sup>19</sup>. The ill-gotten possessions will be destroyed: "Surely many houses shall be desolate, large and beautiful houses, without inhabitant" (Is. 5:9).

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17. Compare the story of Naboth's vineyard: Ahab desired to purchase it, but Naboth was unwilling to part with it, and the king knew that the owner was perfectly right. Queen Jezebel, who was a pagan and had no scruples about Israelite law, managed to bring false accusations against the proprietor, put him to death and confiscate his estate (1 Kg. 21).

18. Ex. 22: 26 is quite explicit: "If ever you take your neighbour's garment in pledge, you shall restore it to him before the sun goes down; for that is his only covering, it is his mantle for his body; in what else shall he sleep?"

19. On the ephah, cf. n. 16; the homer too was a dry measure (6. 524 bushels) but the bath a liquid measure (6. 073 allons).



The ravages of war appear as a direct consequence of oppression and exploitation: the exploiters will not be able to dwell in the houses of hewn stone they have constructed with the exactions they made from the poor; they will not be able to drink the wine from the vineyards they have unjustly appropriated (Amos 5:11b). The women who prompt their husbands to do injustice to the poor shall be taken away "with hooks, 'the last of them' with fishhooks" (Amos 4:2b).<sup>20</sup> Wars will decimate the male population of the land, and women will have to resort to to most humiliating measures to get husbands (Is. 4:1). The Lord will himself take away from the haughty daughters of Jerusalem "the finery of the anklets, the headbands, and the crescents..." (Is. 3:18-26).

The uttering of woes against the unjust oppressors of the poor was followed by persistent calls to conversion, to repentance to change of heart and ways. Repentance has to be shown in something positive. The prophets are emphatic on this point. And in concrete what is it? It is nothing else than to be fair to one's neighbour. Israel's law and customs had laid down how the individual should deal with his fellowmen: he had only to observe the rules, for the prophets do not intend to teach a new religion.<sup>21</sup> They simply tell their contemporaries to translate into practice the great commandment, "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Lev. 19: 18). This is certainly a very high ideal, but the Israelites had to carry it out by endeavouring to do good to their neighbours, by being considerate to the poor and needy, and by not exploiting their less fortunate fellowmen, and by striving after this ideal as much as they could. They would then be fulfilling Yahweh's will. If their repentance resulted in this, they could hope for salvation, otherwise the impending doom announced by the prophets would overtake them.

The prophets make a direct appeal to the conscience of their contemporaries who were oblivious of the rights of their neighbours. They proclaimed woe but it was meant to lead the people to weal. They uttered doom so that blessing might be

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20. The sense here is that guilty women are as helpless as fish caught by the angler.

21. Lindblom, *op. cit.*, pp. 311ff.



realized. In fact, the pre-exilic prophets interspersed their threats with promises. If the people decided to seek Yahweh and do his will, he would be gracious to them.<sup>22</sup> This is the basic theme of their appeal to conscience, of their call to repentance and conversion. But was their preaching effective? Certainly their mission was never a perfect success like the preaching of Jona to the Ninivites! However, there is no reason to doubt that they awakened their contemporaries to an awareness of the injustices prevalent among them and thus contributed to the promotion of social justice. An unwritten page in the history of the prophetic movement in Israel is the series of injustices the prophets were able to prevent through their preaching, which to many of their contemporaries, might have sounded Utopian.

As they defended the rights of the down-trodden and oppressed, the prophets never had in mind the type of economic liberation which has become a burning problem of the moment. For them deliverance from economic woes and the sense of security one enjoys were not ends in themselves. They were rather aids to the pious man to live in accordance with Yahweh's will and thus become a sharer in his gracious gift of salvation. From their vantage point, even economics had its place in the totality of the history of salvation. In the OT a salvation that is wholly detached from the realities of this world was an impossibility,<sup>23</sup> and man's sharing in it was unthinkable apart from his possession of "the food that is needful" (Prv. 30: 8).

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What relevance has the message of the prophets to modern man? Our society, though historically far removed from that of the prophets, is not *toto coelo* different from it in morals and ethical standards. And all the evils condemned by the prophets are, to a greater or lesser degree, prevalent both at "home" and "abroad". History does repeat itself: in the midst of prosperity there is dire need, and enjoyment of the good things of this life on the part of some has its counterpart in the cry of hunger rising from millions. It is the function of the Church to remedy

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22. Lindblom, *op. cit.* p. 316.

23. That is why material blessings loom large in the OT descriptions of the age of bliss,



this situation by appealing to the conscience of Christian believers. When she does so, she will be fulfilling her prophetic mission here on earth. However, before preaching to others, she will have to set her own house in order and be above reproach like the one who said, "Which of you convicts me of sin" (Jn, 8:46)? Otherwise she may have to hear the rebuff, "Physician, heal yourself!"

"Calvary", Trichur-680004

K. J. Varghese

## The Daily Bread in the Teaching of Jesus

It is not right to consider Jesus as a socialist, or as a revolutionary who championed the cause of the exploited masses. His mission here on earth was not to bring about man's economic liberation but rather to proclaim the advent of the kingdom of God. The miracles he performed were not social work in the modern sense but messianic self-revelations. He has not given us any teaching regarding the problem of economic liberation, though we know that he would have condemned exploitation in any form as something incompatible with the kingdom of God. Of course, he was fully aware of the need man has of food in order to keep body and soul together. It is the purpose of this essay to investigate his thought regarding "daily bread" so admirably summed up in the *Pater noster*, "Our Father" (Mt. 6: 9-13. Lk. 11: 2-4). Let us now examine the background of the petition for "daily bread".

Poverty in the sense of utter destitution (such as prevailed in the Graeco-Roman world, or now prevails in the "third world")



was wholly alien to the Jewish community. True, there were the rich and the non-rich, but the latter were not destitutes; the average man was able to eke out, at least a meagre living. Jesus was himself a commoner who lived by the labour of his hands before his public ministry, and in the course of his life of preaching was supported by well-to-do groups. The apostles too were not destitutes. Peter, James and John, for example, were men who worked hard for their daily bread, but they did not have to face a most painful uncertainty regarding the next meal. The Jewish belief that poverty was a curse and riches a blessing from God had certainly affected their life and thinking.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus' teaching on daily bread must be viewed also in the light of the totality of his mission here on earth. In his person and work God's eschatological rule has at last become actual. The kingdom has arrived, and man has to repent and believe in the message he proclaims (Mk 1: 15). He knows well that man's acceptance of his preaching involves a life-long endeavour, and to sustain him in this arduous task, God must himself provide him with food and drink. The bread of which the *Pater noster* speaks is inseparable from the kingdom; in other words, the "daily bread" is an integral part of the eschatological rule of God inaugurated by Jesus' preaching and work. It forms a totality with the marvellous gift of salvation which God, in and through Jesus, is offering to man. It is part and parcel of the demands and promises addressed to man, to whom the whole message of Jesus too is directed,

Luke and Matthew are not interested in the time and place of the "Our Father." Matthew inserts the Lord's Prayer into the Sermon on the Mount, but this is something artificial.<sup>2</sup> It is possible that the prayer was taught at some time in the initial stages of Jesus' ministry. The arrangement of the two Gospels could, theoretically speaking, be right, for Christ could have delivered the prayer once spontaneously to a large number of

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1. There is not, however, the least trace of this belief in the preaching of Jesus.

2. Cf. J. Jeremias, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Facet Books, Philadelphia, 1963) p. 21.



disciples and again a second time to a smaller group (which might or might not have been present on the first occasion) at the request of a disciple. But knowing as we do the nature of tradition, we are virtually certain that the prayer was taught only once, and it is Luke rather than Matthew who gives us the historical background. The latter has transposed the *Pater* in order to exemplify Christ's teaching on prayer, and there is no reason at all to think that Luke has invented the episode he narrates.<sup>3</sup>

The form of the petition for "daily bread" differs characteristically from that of the ones which precede and follow it; compare, *ton arton hēmōn ton epiousion dos hēmin sēmeron* (Mt 6: 11) and *ton arton hēmōn ton epiousion didou hēmin kath'hēmeran* (Lk. 11: 3). "Give us today our daily bread;" and "Give us each day our daily bread."<sup>4</sup> In the other petitions the verb comes first,<sup>5</sup> but here it is preceded by the object in the accusative case. This inversion of the common sequence is adopted doubtless for the purpose of adding emphasis.

Coming to the actual vocabulary of the petition, there is the expression "give bread". It is strange that the phrase occurs only in the *Pater noster*. However, it is said of Jesus that he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to those around him (Mt 14: 19; 15: 36; 26: 26). This statement is inspired by the eucharistic liturgy of the primitive Church, and it cannot be cited as a parallel to the prayer for bread. The only passage in the NT which corresponds to the petition of the Lord's Prayer occurs in the fourth Gospel: "Lord give (*dos*) us this bread always" (6: 34). The early community showed special care to give food to the poor and the widows (Acts 6: 2); there was the serving at table, with persons specially appointed for the purpose. The celebration of the Lord's Supper was known in the primitive

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3. Cf. A. Plummer, *St. Luke* (The International Critical Commentary, 5th ed., repr., Edinburgh, 1951) p. 293.

4. In this paper biblical texts are cited from the *New English Bible*. The translators give in footnotes the alternate rendering "our bread for the morrow".

5. This sequence is clear in the Greek original and in the Latin version but not always in the English translation.



Church by the name "breaking of bread" (Acts 2: 42),<sup>6</sup> but it is never called "giving" of bread. The request, "Give bread to someone" does not at all occur outside the Gospels, and in the Gospels too it is something quite rare.<sup>7</sup>

The OT records how God feeds all his creatures:

"All of them look expectantly to thee  
to give them their food at the proper time;  
what thou givest them they gather up;  
when thou openest thy hand, they eat their fill"  
(Ps. 104: 27f.).

He also shows his special care for the poor and needy:

"I will richly bless her destitute,<sup>8</sup>  
and satisfy her needy with bread" (Ps 132: 15).  
"He has satisfied the thirsty  
and filled the hungry with good things" (Ps 107: 9).

In the light of this OT tradition the specific character of the fourth petition of the *Pater* becomes understandable: it is the prayer of the poor, the needy, the afflicted, the hungry, and the thirsty, and the affliction in which they find themselves is underlined by the expression "today".<sup>9</sup>

A detail regarding the imperative form "give", which is not at all clear in the vernacular versions, deserves to be pointed out here. Matthew uses the aorist imperative form *dos* (from *didōmi*, "I give"), and it means one single giving in order to satisfy the need of the actual, present moment. Luke has, however, employed the present form of the imperative, *didou*, which implies a continued giving for each day, for every day of man's life here on earth.

6. Since the expression here can denote any meal, there are scholars who deny that it refers to the Eucharist in Acts 2: 42.

7. Cf. E. Lohmeyer, *Our Father* (New York, 1952) p. 135.

8. The Hebrew text literally means "her produce." This sense does not suit the context, and hence translators adopt the conjectural meaning given in the text.

9. Lohmeyer, *op. cit.*, p. 138.



Another example of the uniqueness of the petition for food in the "Our Father" is found in the phrase "our bread." Nowhere else in the NT, and only rarely in the OT, is there the occurrence of the word "bread" with a personal pronoun, and where it does occur, it has a special meaning and emphasis. The exhortation, "Share your food with the hungry" (Is. 58: 7), means "Share what belongs to you with the hungry, even though you yourself need it." In the fourth petition of the *Pater* "our bread" has therefore a special meaning: it is the bread that we need, and we ask for it because without it we will have to go hungry.

The objective content of the word "bread" also points in the same direction. The Hebrew word *lehem* (= Aramaic *lehmā'*) describes not only what is baked from wheat flour but also any food whatever. "To eat bread" (Gen. 43: 25, Ex. 2; 20. 1 Sam. 20: 24. Je. 41:1 etc.) simply means "to have (take) a meal." Hence *lehem* can very well be translated as nourishment. Therefore, in the Lord's prayer, the bread of need for which the hungry request God is at the same time the nourishment that he gives out of his generosity and goodness. Thus the petition "Give us bread" becomes above all the prayer of the hungry.<sup>10</sup>

The word *sēmeron* ("today") in Matthew's text brings out clearly that the bread in question is what the poor and the hungry need. In the Eighteen Benedictions<sup>11</sup> the corresponding petition runs as follows: "Bless this year unto us, O Lord, our God, together with every kind of produce." This is the prayer of the farmer who requests God to produce in his field the fruit which will feed him until the next seed-time. The fourth petition of the "Our Father" is uttered by a daily worker who in the morning does not know whether he will find work and bread for the day that has just dawned, or by a traveller who takes nothing on his journey, no purse, no money, as Jesus bade his disciples do (Mk. 6: 8).

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10. Lohmeyer, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

11. Cf. A. Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Liturgy and its Development* (Shocken Paperbacks, New York, 1967) p. 308. The Jewish composition known by the name *Shemoneh-Esreh* is a grandiose prayer, consisting of eighteen benedictions directed to God for all that he has done for or promised to Israel.



The "today" probably presupposes the custom prevalent in the Middle East of baking each day only what was necessary for the day, so that what is baked in the morning was consumed by the evening. The poor man did not calculate and keep food for a meal which went beyond a single day. Like a beggar or traveller he asked for a small gift "for God's sake!"

Luke's text uses the phrase *kath'hēmeran*, which must be analysed as *kata* (a preposition governing noun in the genitive or accusative case) *hēmeran* (accusative of *hēmera*, "day"). The expression occurs a number of times in the Greek text of the NT, and invariably the sense is distributive, i. e., "every day, daily."<sup>12</sup> *Hēmera* means the civil or legal day, including too the night (Mt. 6: 34. 15: 32. Mk. 6: 21. Lk. 13: 14), and it is distinguished from the hour (Mt. 25: 13), months and years (Rev. 9: 15). What the prayer in Luke's text asks of God is the giving of bread for every day, a daily "ration" which has to be continued as long as the suppliant is in the land of the living. In spite of the linguistic differences between the traditions of the two Evangelists, the content of the request remains the same.

The next word to be discussed, *epiousios*, has been the object of scholarly discussion ever since the time of Origen (180-254?) who made the remark that the word did not occur either in Greek literature or in popular usage, and that it had probably been coined by the Evangelists.<sup>13</sup> We are still in the dark about the origin and exact meaning of this remarkable word,<sup>14</sup> which, incidentally, is the only adjective occurring in the

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12. Cf. Mt. 26: 55, Mk. 14: 49. Lk. 11: 3, 16: 19, 19: 47, 22: 53, Acts. 2: 46f., 3: 2, 16: 5, 17: 11, 19: 9, 1 Cor. 15: 31, Heb. 7: 27 and 10: 1. The distributive sense occurs also in "every year, annually" (Lk. 2: 41. Heb. 9: 25. 10: 13).

13. This is not quite accurate, for the word is found once in a papyrus document from Egypt, where it may be the equivalent of Latin *diaria* (plural of *diarium*, "daily allowance of food").

14. Several derivations have been proposed by specialists; summary in W. Arndt-F.W. Gingrich, *A greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, 1957) p, 297.



*pater noster*, and it is possible that in the original Aramaic text of the prayer there was nothing corresponding to it. This will mean that *epiousios* is an addition made to the *Pater* by the tradition of the Church. The testimony of the most ancient versions is strongly in favour of a meaning having reference to time, with emphasis either on the morrow ("of tomorrow, for the coming day") or on the actual present ("for the day, daily").

According to St. Jerome our unusual term is the rendering of Aramaic *māhar*. In his commentary on Mt. 6: 11 he writes: "In Evangelio quod appellatur secundum Hebraeos, pro 'super-substantiali pane,' reperi *mahar*, quod dicitur 'crastinum'; ut sit sensus: 'Panem nostrum crastinum,' i. e., futurum da nobis hodie."<sup>15</sup> For many scholars this testimony is the most decisive reason for translating "bread for the morrow."<sup>16</sup> The Lord uttered the prayer in Aramaic, his mother tongue, and the present Greek text is only a translation made for the sake of Greek-speaking believers. The original form of the prayer could very well have survived among the Aramaic-speaking Jewish Christians of Palestine, and the text they handed down might be as near the *ipsissima verba Domini* as we can get. There is the distinct possibility that the bread for the morrow indicated a spiritual understanding of the request among Jewish Christians, and this would not be anything unusual in the early Church.<sup>17</sup>

We may ask whether the interpretation proposed by the Judaeo-Christians is compatible with what Jesus had to say about anxiety, particularly in Mt. 6: 34.<sup>18</sup> It is not merely a question as to whether prayer for things necessary for the morrow is anxiety. Some have argued that prayer is the best antidote to anxiety. The problem is whether the Christian believer can, today, seek for tomorrow's bread. We should know that in Palestine

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15. The Vulgate has *supersubstantialis* in Mt. 6: 11 and *cotidianus* in Lk. 11: 3 (cf. too the *Vetus Itala* or the Latin version prior to the Vulgate, which has the latter rendering).

16. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

17. Lohmeyer, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

18. For what follows, cf. G. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, II, p. 595.



wages were not given to day-workers the night before. They received the usual meal during the day. Nor could the disciples pray in this way any more than the workers of their age. For they were sent out without bread or money (Mt. 6: 8), because the labourer was always worthy of his reward, and was to eat what was set before him in the house where he was given hospitality (Lk. 10: 7). Furthermore the petition of the *Pater* under study is not concerned with the when and how and whether of obtaining the means of livelihood: these were simply sought and received from the hand of God. It was of the very nature of faith (from which the request for bread sprang) to expect God's help and count on it every time a need arose, though generally not before the need. The same attitude of faith may be seen in the story of manna (Ex, 16). Thus *epiousios*, in the sense of "food for the morrow" is hardly conceivable in the concrete situation in which the Lord's prayer was uttered. Preoccupation with the morrow was in fact an attitude not in keeping with the idea of faith in both the OT and NT.<sup>19</sup>

The fact seems to be that *epiousios* indicates not time but measure: it defined the amount of bread the believer needed. We are reminded of the story of manna, the point of which is that those who gathered too much had no superfluity, while those who gathered less had also no lack. What Christ had in mind was not the space of a day (*hēmera*) but what his followers needed. Understood thus *epiousios* expresses the confidence that God will give the believer what he needs when the need arises.<sup>20</sup>

In our present state of knowledge we cannot say what exactly is the derivation of *epiousios*, what was its original meaning or what occasional or circumstantial meaning it might originally have been given. But in the light of the foregoing discussion there can be little doubt that its force is adequately brought out by the rendering, "The bread which we need give us today (day by day)". Has this request anything to do with the theme of eating and drinking which occurs so often in the teaching of Jesus?

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19. Kittel, *op. cit.*, p. 597.

20. Kittel, *op. cit.*, p. 598.



It is a remarkable feature of the Synoptic Gospels that they speak more frequently of eating and drinking, of food and nourishment, than any writing or group of writings in the OT.<sup>21</sup> As a parable or an event, as a warning or promise, as a threat or assurance, the mention of food and drink pervades every strand of the gospel tradition. There is a duty to feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty (Mt. 25: 34). "How blest are you who now go hungry: your hunger shall be sated" (Lk. 6: 21). "You shall eat and drink at my table in my kingdom" (Lk. 22: 30). "Alas for you who are well-fed now; you shall go hungry" (Lk. 6: 25.) The well-known parable of Dives and Lazarus (Lk. 16: 19-31) has given unforgettable expression to the idea.

There is a very close connection between eschatological fulfilment and the fact of eating and drinking. In the preaching of Jesus the figure of the marriage feast and the king's guests, of eating and drinking and reclining at table with the patriarchs, of resting in Abraham's bosom, of harvesting and sowing, serve to show the wider context in which "our daily bread" is situated. One might almost say that from this point of view to pray for the coming of the kingdom and to pray "Give us our bread today" amount to the same thing.

Jesus has come to invite (*kalesai*) sinners (Mk. 2: 17). Now the verb used here can also mean to invite guests for a meal. In fact, in Mk. 2: 13-17 mention is made of a meal in which publicans and sinners were taking part. The statement, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve" (Mk. 10: 45), includes the verb *diakonein* which means "to wait at table." All are invited to the feast of which Jesus speaks. The beggars and cripples, the outcasts of society from along the hedges and fences and byways, and the Gentiles will sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Mt. 8: 11). On that occasion Jesus will himself act as the gracious host in the kingdom of his father: "Happy are those servants... He (the master) will fasten his belt, seat them at table, and come and wait on them" (Lk. 12: 37).

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21. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, p. 25.



The significance of bread as something to be shared with the hungry is best brought out in the two accounts of the miraculous feeding of the masses (Mt. 14: 13-21, 15: 32-39 and parallels). For both these meals display, in action and in event, all the features revealed by Jesus' utterances about bread. They are simple meals; Jesus is the host, and he, like any other Jewish householder, feeds his guests in accordance with pious usage, with the frugal fare he has at his disposal. And the purpose of this meal is that hunger should be assuaged and that all should be full. "They all ate to their hearts' content... Some five thousand men shared in this meal, to say nothing of women and children" (Mt. 14: 20f. 15: 37f.). But this meal is also, as the miracle shows, part of the reality of the consummation when the elect will "eat and drink" with Jesus in his kingdom (Lk. 22: 30). The bread that he gives here today is also the bread that he will share with them in the kingdom of his Father.<sup>22</sup>

From such a conception of bread, from the custom of a meal continued day after day, there derives, at the end of Jesus' life, the institution of a meal for his disciples. The Eucharist is a legacy of yesterday, a feast for today, and a promise for the future.<sup>23</sup>

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In the hierarchy of values proper to the new order of things established by Jesus the daily bread has its own place. The believer prays to God for bread because it is holy. The bread is holy because it satisfies the hungry and also because God's all-victorious and tender care can be perceived whenever and wherever pangs of hunger are stilled. But it is holier still because for those who receive it and taste it in their capacity as God's children, it is the image and reality, in this transitory age, of the eschatological banquet, and therefore also of the kingdom of God.

The request for bread in the "Our Father" gives us a profound insight into the rôle the *artos epiousios* ("daily bread")

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22. Lohmeyer, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

23. It is, however, most unlikely that the request for bread in the "Our Father" includes a reference to the Eucharist.



has to play in the establishment of God's kingdom: for a man to be able to say "Hallowed be thy name", God must first give him his daily bread; the Father in heaven must first fulfil the petition, "Give us today our bread." Jesus was not an Ebionite, and he never condemned wealth as something intrinsically evil, though he did warn his followers about its dangers. Regarding the daily bread his position was the same as that of the pious Israelite who prayed:

"Two things I ask of thee;  
do not withhold them from me before I die...  
give me neither poverty nor wealth,  
provide me with only the food I need.  
If I have too much, I shall deny thee  
and say, 'Who is the Lord?'  
If I am reduced to poverty, I shall steal  
and blacken the name of my God" (Prv. 30: 7-9).

In conclusion we say that the prayer for daily sustenance in the *Pater noster* embodies a veritable theology of economic liberation, but it is a theology which has its focus on the kingdom of God and its establishment here on earth.

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# The New Testament Church and the Economic Liberation of Man

Not surprisingly the New Testament church offers us no clear-cut blue-print for the economic liberation of man. An insignificant community of largely poor artisans,<sup>1</sup> living on the geographical and cultural margins of the Roman world and wholly lost in a population that was at best indifferent but often savagely hostile, the New Testament Church could scarcely have dreamed of any large scale socio-economic renewal of the world. Indeed its hopes were set not on the transformation of society but on the coming of her exalted Lord. It was the end of history rather than its transformation through human effort that the first followers of Jesus eagerly awaited.

This may explain the oddly non-committal attitude of the first Christians to the burning social issues of their day. Paul indeed exhorts Philemon to receive his runaway slave Onesimus as "no longer a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you" (Philem 16); but he does not question the institution of slavery itself and will urge the Christian slaves at Corinth to remain slaves, even when an opportunity for freedom offers:

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1. On the social status of the first Christians cf. E. Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, trs. Olive Wyon (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931) vol. I, 42; and M. Hengel, *Property and Riches in the Early Church*, trs. H. J. Bowden (London: SCM Press) 36-39; 60-62. Though recruited eventually from all classes of society the first Jewish and Greek Christians belonged like Jesus himself and his disciples) largely to the lower though not the lowest strata of the Hellenistic world. They came not from what would today be called the proletariat (landless labourers living on occasional earnings) but from the working and lower middle classes - "manual workers and craftsmen, small-business men and workers on the land" (Hengel, *op. cit.*, 60).



Every one should remain in the state in which he was called. Were you a slave when called? Never mind. But even if you can gain your freedom, make use rather of your present state.<sup>2</sup> (1 Cor 7: 20-21).

Paul is aware too that among those who have been "baptized into Christ" there is "neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor freeman, there is neither male nor female" (Gal 3: 28). All such differences have no religious significance and count for nothing before God. Yet his directives on the role of women in marriage (wives are to be subordinate to their husbands—cf. 1 Cor 11: 3; Eph 5: 21) and in worship (women are to be silent in church—cf. 1 Cor 14: 34-35; 1 Tim 2: 9-15) reflect the characteristic male chauvinistic attitudes of the patriarchal society to which he belonged.<sup>3</sup>

Yet it is just these two instances that show the tension between the concrete directives Paul gives and the principles he proclaims. For while Paul does not preach the emancipation of slaves or women's liberation, he does announce unambiguously the strict equality of all men (and women!) before God-- and it is on this that both the emancipation of slaves and the liberation of women will ultimately depend. Paul, that is, did not fully spell out (has the Church even today?) the last consequences of the

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2. Paul is here ambiguous. His elliptical *mallon chrēsai* ("but rather use it") can refer either to the opportunity for freedom which presents itself to a slave ("if you can become free, avail yourself of the opportunity"), or to the condition of slavery in which he stands ("even though you can become free make use rather of your present state"). While most translations opt for the first alternative (so the RSV, JB, NEB, TEV, Moffat and Phillips), most commentaries rightly choose the second, as this fits in better with Paul's argument here (so Lietzmann in the *Handbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Wendland in *Das Neue Testament Deutsch*, Hering in the *Commentaire du Nouveau Testament* and Conzelmann in *Hermeneia*, against Plummer in *The International Critical Commentary*).

3. Cf. E. Lohmeyer, *Soziale Frage im Urchristentum* (Darmstadt Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, rp 1973) 97-98.



message of Jesus. But these consequences lie in germ in the messages he proclaims and will burgeon into life at the appropriate moment when the 'signs of the time' have prodded the church into a new leap in its self-understanding.

So while the New Testament can give us no blue-print for the economic liberation of man, it can and does give us the values and principles on which such a blue-print can be drawn. It tells us, that is, what were the specifically Christian attitudes of the early Church towards poverty and wealth— and it is these attitudes that must inspire any Christian programme of economic reform. But it is not easy to determine just what these attitudes and values are, because it is never easy to generalize about the New Testament church. Early Christianity was neither uniform nor static. Local Church differed from local church, and each had its own history of doctrine and practice. Yet behind all the diversity and dynamism of the New Testament church lies the common heritage of the Christian faith, and stemming from it common attitudes towards the economic liberation of man. It is these attitudes that are spelt out below.

### Eschatological Detachment

The social thinking of the New Testament church was strongly coloured by its belief in the imminent coming of the risen Lord. Living thus in constant expectation of the imminent end of the world the first Christians could have scarcely worked up much interest in the socio-economic reorganization of society. Questions about money would have appeared to them largely irrelevant, for neither the capitalist urge to accumulate wealth nor the communist passion to distribute it equitably would have made much sense in a world which was passing away. As Bloch puts it in his perceptive comment on the supposed economic naivete of the primitive church: "if the footsteps of those who are to bury the world and its care are at the door, economic concern for the day after tomorrow is stupid."<sup>4</sup>

We find among the first Christians, then, a tendency to a certain disinterest in the economic side of life, leading in extreme

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4. E. Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (Stuttgart 1959) III, 1488, quoted in Hengel, *op. cit.* (seen. 1 above) 32.



cases to the vagabondage which Paul mentions in 2 Thess 3: 11 "for we hear some of you are living in idleness, mere busy bodies, not doing any work". Paul counters this with a severely practical rule, deriving, one suspects, more from his petty bourgeois origins (with its intense respect for hard work than from his Christian experience:<sup>5</sup> "if any one will not work let him not eat" (1 Thess 3: 10). But Paul himself is not uninfluenced by early Christian eschatology. If he commends work, it is always with detachment:

I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short; from now on let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it.

For the form of the world is passing away.

(1 Cor 7: 29-31)

Commentators see in this the influence of the popular Stoic ideals of equanimity (*ataraxia*) and self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*),<sup>6</sup> whereby the philosopher was supposed through a drastic reduction of his needs ("my belief is that to have no wants is divine; to have as few as possible is next to divine", says Socrates in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (1. 6. 10)<sup>7</sup>, to attain to a maximum degree of self-sufficiency ("the wise man is self-sufficient [*autarkēs*]").<sup>8</sup> But while the ideals of Stoicism and early Christianity did indeed partially overlap,<sup>9</sup> Paul's call for freedom from the world goes well beyond the Stoic ideal. For the freedom Paul expects is not just freedom

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5. Cf. Hengel, *ibid.*, 60.

6. Cf. H. Lietzmann, *An die Korinther I-II* (Tübingen: HNT, 1949) 34; H. Conzelmann, *I Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Hermeneia) 133.

7. Quoted in Hengel, *op. cit.* (see n. 1 above 55).

8. A saying attributed to Antisthenes the teacher of Diogenes - cf. Hengel, *ibid.*

9. Cf. the extended discussion on the social ethics of Stoicism and Christianity in Troeltsch, *op. cit.* (see n. I above) 64-69.



from the hindering attachments that come in the way of tranquillity and self-possession, but a freedom for proclamation and service. So "Paul's advice is not to withdraw into the safe and unrestricted realm of the inner life, but to maintain freedom in the midst of involvement".<sup>10</sup> The Apocalyptic, not Stoicism, is the ultimate source of the attitude Paul commends, and this attitude is not at all unlike the *niṣkāma karma* demanded by the *Bhagvadgita* (II, 47), for like that of the Gita, Pauline detachment too is based on the conviction of the ultimate irrelevance of the world: "the form of the world is passing away!"

Such texts must of course be balanced against other passages in Paul — particularly the great texts of Paul's cosmic christology — which speak much more positively of the world and of history.<sup>11</sup> But such texts are few, obscure and ambiguous. Rom 8: 19-23 does indeed hint at the redemption of the cosmos ("because creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the sons of God"); 1 Cor 8: 6 speaks of the role of Christ in creation ("one Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things and for whom we exist"); Col 1: 15-20 proclaims the cosmic lordship of Christ over all things created and redeemed ("He is the first born of all creation, for in him all things were created in heaven and on earth... He is the first born from among the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent"); and Eph 1: 9-10 reveals God's plan to crown all cosmic and human history in Christ ("a plan for the fulness of time, to gather together all things in Christ; things in heaven and things on earth"). So creation is made a part of redemption (overcoming the apocalyptic dichotomy between this age and the age to come), and a positive meaning is given to the cosmos and to history. But this meaning is never really spelled out clearly, and by and large the New Testament remains quite reserved towards involvement in the world. Indeed even when the first fervour of parousiac expectation has died down and the church had settled down to the long haul of history (cf. the Pastoral Epistles where the expectation of the Parousia

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10. Conzelmann, *I Cor* 133.

11. These texts are discussed extensively in J. G. Gibbs, *Creation and Redemption: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 1971).



is no longer dominant, or Luke-Acts where it is positively played down), its attitude towards the economic realities of life still continue to reflect the eschatological detachment of Jesus' sharp directive: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be yours as well" (Mt 6: 33).

### Social Protest

Exhortations to detachment from the economic and social pressures of life give way, in the post-Pauline letters, to warnings against riches as a danger to salvation (taking up the stern warning uttered by Jesus in Mk 10: 23-25; Mt 6: 24; Lk 16: 19-30) to a re-affirmation of the privileged state of the poor (echoing the beatitudes of Jesus in Lk 6: 20-21); and to a strong social protest against the oppressive actions of the rich (cf. the woes uttered by Jesus in Lk 6: 24-25). Already 1 Tim 6: 6-10 — a stunningly apt judgement on the insatiable hunger of the consumer societies of the "developed" world — warns against the unbridled desire for riches ("but those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction"); urges a Gandhian contentment with the basic necessities of life ("but if we have food and clothing with these we shall be content"); and propounds the oft-repeated but little credited maxim that "the love of money is the root of all evil".

The letter of James goes much further. This curious and little known epistle — really collection of Judaeo-Christian wisdom-type aphorisms masquerading as a letter, possibly because of the influence of the highly successful letters of Paul<sup>12</sup> — speaks of riches and the rich in three significant passages of increasing vehemence. Jas 1:9-10 exhorts the lowly to joy reminding them of the familiar Old Testament theme of the impermanence of riches:

Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,  
and the rich in his humiliation,  
because like the flower of the grass he will pass away.

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12. Cf. W. G. Kümmel, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, trs. A. J. Mattil (London: SCM Press) 287-89.



For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls and its beauty perishes.  
So will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits (Jas 1: 9-10)

Jas 2: 1-7 urges Christians to show no partiality towards the rich, pointing out that it is the poor who are favoured by God, while the rich are those who persecute and oppress:

Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in the faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonoured the poor man.

Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme that honourable name by which you are called?

(Jas 2: 5-7)

And Jas 5: 1-6 breaks out into a violent attack on the godless rich who have put their trust in their riches and have acquired them by exploiting the poor:

Come now you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.

Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth eaten.

Your gold and silver have rusted and their rust will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire...

Behold the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud cry out; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.

You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.

You have condemned, you have killed the righteous man; he does not resist you.

(Jas 5: 1-6)



Here we have an authentic note of social protest, recalling the social concern of Old Testament law for the "hired servant"; that is, the landless farm labourer (Lev 19: 13; Dt 24: 15); and the social protest of Old Testament prophecy against the fraudulent, oppressive and luxury-loving rich (Is 3: 14-15; Amos 2: 6-8; 8: 4-8; Mic 2: 1-4). The protest centres round a single burning issue—the non-payment by the rich of the wages due to the poor—for this was the social injustice that weighed down most widely and most crushingly when the large masses of landless labourers that constituted the proletariat of the ancient world, and was the commonest form of exploitation then prevalent.<sup>13</sup> James' protest is vigorous enough (more violently than any in the New Testament) but it is still inhibited by apocalyptic passivism. It does not seek redress in revolutionary action, but leaves the exploiters to the judgment of God!

### Christian Concern

All such protest is rooted not in some Teilhardian vision of evolutionary history, which would identify human progress with the coming of the Kingdom, nor even (as with the social protest of the Old Testament prophets) in passionate zeal for the restoration of covenant righteousness in Israel,<sup>14</sup> but simply in a radical concern for the 'neighbour' who has become a 'brother' because he has been called into the family of God. Love, and primarily the love of the 'brotherhood' (1 Pet 2: 17) — for while Jesus summoned his followers to a truly universal love which would reach out to every one in need (Lk 10: 29-37), the concrete exercise of this love was naturally spelled out by the New Testament church principally in terms of the believing community<sup>15</sup> — is the primary expression of the Christian existence. It is the great commandment given by Jesus (Mk 12: 28-34) with a

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13. Cf. J. Chain, *L'Epître de saint Jacques* (Paris: Etudes Bibliques, 1927) 116-17.

14. Cf. G. Koonthanam, "Prophets in a World Divided by Wealth and Power", *Biblehashyam* 1 (1975) 182-194. sp. pp. 182-83.

15. So strikingly 1 Jn. Even the description of the last judgment in Mt 25: 31-41 may not be an exhortation to Christians, urging them to universal concern, but a lesson to nonbelievers



new emphasis and definition (Jn 15: 12) as the more excellent way (*margā*) which surpasses the way of charismatic enthusiasm (I Cor 12: 31); indeed the specific mark of Christian discipleship (Jn 13: 35).

Such love embraces man in his totality, reaching out to his material as well as to his spiritual needs. James demonstrates this with characteristic vigour and concreteness, illustrating his thesis that faith without works is dead with a single telling example taken precisely from the realm of social concern:

What does it profit my brethren if a man says he has faith but has no works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them: "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself if it has no works is dead.

(Jas 2 : 15-17)

The same effective compassion, rooted ultimately in the concrete demands of Jesus himself (Mt 25: 31-46) is illustrated by Paul in his own untiring efforts to collect funds for the poverty-stricken members of the Jerusalem church (Rom 15: 26; 1 Cor 16: 1; 2 Cor 8: 4), is demanded by John as a proof of the genuineness ("not in word or speech but in deed and in truth") of the love he so persistently urges in his letters (1 Jn 3: 17), and is indeed part of the exhortation of all the New Testament epistles (cf. 1 Tim 6: 18; Heb 13-16; 1 Pet 4: 8-9). But its most striking expression is surely the so-called "religious Communism of Love" attempted by the Jerusalem church,<sup>16</sup> as described in the first chapters of Acts.

Acts speaks of this love-communism in two of the three summaries (2, 42-47; 4, 32-35; 5, 12-15) through which it attempts

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showing them that they will be judged according to their treatment of the least of Christ's brothers - cf. V. Furnish, *The Love Commandment* (London: SCM Press, 1973) 79-84. As Hengel *op. cit.* (see n. 1 above) 85, remarks of the early Christians' social ethic, "their ethic was a theonomous community ethic, born of faith working through love' (Gal 5. 6)".

16. The expression is Troeltsch's, *op. cit.*, (see n. 1 above) 62.



to give us a general picture of the life of the first Christian community. The two descriptions are very similar and obviously interdependent, though the second is rather more elaborate than the first.

2: 44-45

And all who believed were together

and had all things in common.

And they sold their possessions and goods

and distributed them to all as any had need.

4: 32-35

Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that anything he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common.

There was not a needy person among them for as many as were possessors of lands or houses, sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the feet of the apostles;

and distribution was made to each as any had need.

The close parallelism of the two summaries suggests that Luke has had a hand in their formulation – though whether they are *ab ovo* creations of his (so Dibelius and Haenchen),<sup>17</sup> or contain traditional material he has worked over (so Jeremias, Cerfaux and Benoit)<sup>18</sup> is vigorously disputed. Equally disputed is their historical

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17. Cf. M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* trs. Mary Ling (London: SCM Press, 1956) 128-129; E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, trs. B. Noble and G. Shian (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971) 232-35.

18. Cf. J. Jeremias, "Untersuchungen zum Quellenproblem der Apostelgeschichte", *ZNW* 36 (1937) 205-21; L. Cerfaux, "La première communauté chrétienne à Jérusalem", *ETL* 16 (1939) 5-31; and specially P. Benoit. "Some Notes on the 'Summaries' in acts 2, 4 and 5", in his *Jesus and the Gospel*, II, trs. B. Weatherhead (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1974) 94-103. The three authors however do not agree on which parts of the summaries are to be assigned to tradition and which to Lucan editing.



worth. To what extent do these summaries accurately portray the earliest Jerusalem community? Modern commentators on the whole are inclined to take them for unhistorical idealizations.<sup>19</sup> Luke is generalizing from isolated incidents (like the case of Barnabas reported in Acts 4: 36-37) to create an ideal picture of the first Christian community. The artificial character of these summaries is shown in fact by their stereotyped character and by their many allusions to descriptions of ideal communities in the Old Testament and in classical Greek sources. Acts 4: 34 ("there was not a needy person among them") clearly refers to the promise in Dt 15: 4: "there will be no poor among you." Acts 4: 32 ("were of one heart and mind" and "had all things in common") echoes Aristotle's description of perfect friends as those who are of one mind (*mai psychē*) and have all things in common (*koina ta tōn philōn*);<sup>20</sup> and Acts 4: 35 ("and distribution was made to each as any had need") recalls Plato's ideal of a city in which "there is nothing which a man can call his own except his body, all other things being common property."<sup>21</sup> Luke is obviously presenting the Jerusalem Church as a model community which fulfilled the expectations of both the Jewish and the Greek worlds.

Yet idealized though they undoubtedly are, it is likely that these summaries of Acts do, in fact, give us a basically true picture of the Jerusalem church. Living in the glow of the Resurrection, full of Pentecostal enthusiasm, awaiting with single minded expectation the coming of their risen Lord, the first Christians would have lived much as Acts describes it — "all

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19. Cf. K. Luke, 'The Communism of Acts II and IV-VI and the Appointment of the Seven', in F. Jackson and K. Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity*, Part I, vol. V (London: Macmillan, 1933) 140-51; Haenchen, Acts 232-35; H. Conzelmann, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Tubingen: HNT, 1972) 44-45.

20. Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea* IX 1168b.

21. Plato, *Republic* V, 463. We quote from the translation of J. L. Davies, *The Republic of Plato* (London: Macmillan, 1950) 173. Cerfaux, *op.cit.*, (see n. 18 above) 26-28, surmises direct literary dependence on Plato or one or other of the Hellenistic works (notably, Iamblichus, *The Life of Pythagoras* 167-69) dependent on him.



together" (*epi to autō*) and "with one heart and mind" (*kardia kai psychē mai*), expressing their sense of community (*koinonia*) through a spontaneous voluntary and quite unorganized sharing of goods (not 'communism' strictly, since private property was not given up nor condemned but kept and used for the benefit of all) through which social inequalities were evened out, and the needs of the indigent met.

Yet this 'love-communism' remained a unique experiment in the New Testament church. We find no trace of it elsewhere. And even in Jerusalem it seems to have had little success — leading to the quarrels between the Aramaic and Greek speaking widows described in Acts 6: 1 and perhaps — though other factors like the famine under Claudius (Acts 11: 28) may also have contributed to this — to the indigence of the Jerusalem community which made it dependent on the 'foreign aid' of Paul.

Yet the concern that inspired it continued, showing itself in unstinted hospitality towards the visiting brother, in an intensive and comprehensive care for the poor of the community, quite unparalleled in the ancient world,<sup>22</sup> in extensive relief work undertaken in times of catastrophe, in the sobriety and hard work encouraged in the community, and in the strong moral pressure exerted on the rich to use their wealth for the benefit of the poor.<sup>23</sup>

The social action of the New Testament church remains at this level of organized charity and economic relief. No radical change of structures is attempted or envisaged. Yet in its vigorous

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22. But modelled perhaps on the organized charity of Judaism, with its *kuppah* (basket) a weekly collection doled out to the poor of a community in amounts sufficient for fourteen meals, and its *tamhui* (tray) a daily distribution made to those without food for the day— cf. K. Lake: *op. cit.* (see n. 19 above), 148–49. Lake thinks that something analogous to this lay behind the so-called communism of the Jerusalem church described in Acts 2 and 4.

23. Cf. Hengel, *op. cit.* (see n. 1 above) 60–69.



criticism of riches and the oppressive rich, and in its radical concern for the poor we find elements enough for a powerful critique of consumer society and a radical programme of social reform. For if effective concern for our fellow-men demands a thorough change of the social dehumanizing social structures which oppress them (and this is what we are realizing ever more clearly today) then it is to this that the New Testament will impel us.

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## Economic Reform Movements in Ancient Western Asia

The fact that more than a millennium before the birth of Karl Marx the land of Iran was the scene of an endeavour to set up a most thorough-going communist system of government may not be known to the non-specialist. Equally unknown may perhaps be the fact that rulers in ancient Western Asia<sup>1</sup> carried out reforms and enacted laws to improve the lot of the average man. It is the purpose of this study to offer the reader a short account of the endeavours made in antiquity to create some sort of equitable social order. East European scholars have published a number of highly specialized monographs and articles on the question, all with of course the Marxist slant, but these publications remain virtually inaccessible to most orientalist and

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1 To keep the paper within reasonable bounds we shall not touch upon Egypt.



exegetes.<sup>2</sup> We shall first discuss the situation in Mesopotamia and then give a short account of the bloody revolution in Iran.

# I

The period around 10,000 B. C. witnessed what historians have termed the neolithic revolution, for it was at this time that mankind made the transition from the age of food-gathering to that of food-production, began domesticating animals, and started building permanent settlements.<sup>3</sup> This revolution had four main centres, namely, the Anatolian Plateau (= Asia Minor, or Asiatic

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2 The 18th Rencontre assyriologique internationale (Munich June 29 – July 3, 1970) had as its theme “social classes in ancient Mesopotamia and in the adjacent areas,” and the papers read on the occasion have been edited by D. O. Edzard, *Gesellschaftsklassen im Alten Zweiströmland und in den angrenzenden Gebieten* (Abhandlungen der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-his. Klasse, N. F. 75. Veröffentlichungen der Kommission zur Erschliessung von Keilschrifttexten, A, 6, Munich, 1972). We add here a short list of some publications which are of the highest interest. I. M. Diakonoff, *Structure of Society and State in Early Dynastic Sumer* (Monographs of the Ancient Near East I/III, Los Angeles, 1974). The author is a well-known Russian Assyriologist following the Marxist tradition; the present work is a summary and translation of selected passages from a major monograph. W. Eilers, *Gesellschaftsformen im altbabylonischen Recht* (Leipziger rechtswissenschaftliche Studien 65, Leipzig, 1932, repr., 1970). A. Falkenstein, “La cité-temple sumérienne,” *Cahiers d'histoire mondiale* 1 (1954) pp. 784–814; English translation, *The Sumerian Temple City* (Monographs of the Ancient Near East 1/I, Los Angeles 1974). I. J. Gelb, “From Slavery to Freedom”, *Gesellschaftsklassen*, pp. 81–92. H. Klengel (ed.), *Beiträge zur sozialen Struktur des alten Vorderasien* (Schriften zur Geschichte und Kultur des Alten Orients 1, Berlin 1971). Y. Rosengarten, *Le concept sumérien de consommation dans la vie économique et religieuse. Etude linguistique et sociale d'après les textes présargoniques de Lagash* (Paris, 1960). Other relevant literature will be indicated in the notes that follow.

3. Cf. *The Cambridge Ancient History* I/1 (3rd ed., Cambridge, 1970) pp. 248–51, 295f., passim.



Turkey), the Kurdistan mountain ranges, Palestine and the areas of the Hindukush. The next giant-step in humanity's evolution was the rise of urban settlements<sup>4</sup> and the spread of the art of writing, thanks to the genius of the Sumerians, that mysterious race of men whom we meet with in Southern Mesopotamia around 3000 B. C.<sup>5</sup> The progress thus achieved had also unwholesome collateral effects in the economic sphere, as will be clear from what follows.

The sumerians had evolved some sort of primitive democracy,<sup>6</sup> and in their city-states political power ultimately rested with the UNKIN<sup>7</sup>, i. e., the general assembly of the elders who by definition were free citizens, and whose business it was to guide and govern the affairs of their respective cities. The antiquity of the institution is borne out by the fact that the sign for UNKIN is already employed in the archaic texts from Uruk,<sup>8</sup> which go back to Early Proto-Literate times (i. e., even

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4. Before this period there were only village cultures in Mesopotamia and elsewhere, including also India.

5. The ethnic and linguistic affinities of the Sumerians remain a moot problem. We may note here in passing that Adam Falkenstein, the great Sumeriologist, pointed out more than forty years ago the morphological affinity existing between Sumerian and the Dravidian family of languages (cf. *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 37 (1933) col. 304); recently Wolfram von Soden one of the foremost Accadian scholars of the present, has also endorsed this view (cf. his *Herrscher im alten Orient* [Berlin, 1954] pp. 8f.).

6. This has been highlighted particularly by the Danish Sumeriologist Thorkild Jacobsen, in his studies, "Early Political Development in Mesopotamia", *Toward an Image of Tammuz and Other Essays on Mesopotamian History and Culture* (Harvard Semitic Series 21, Harvard, 1970) pp. 132-72, and "Primitive Democracy in Ancient Mesopotamia," *ibid.*, pp. 173-86; answer to criticisms, *ibid.*, p. 370, n. 11 (pp. 370-72).

7. Also written UNKEN (UN. KI. EN) and UKKIN; its equivalent in Accadian is *puhru*, "assembly". In this paper Sumerian words are written in capitals and Accadian ones in italics.

8. This city, known now as Warka, is mentioned in the OT where the form attested, however, is Erech (Gen. 10: 10. Ezr. 4: 9).



before 3000).<sup>9</sup> In times of grave crisis, as, for instance, when there was threat of war, it was the citizens' assembly that chose a leader and invested him with full power; the person thus selected was known by the title ENSI,<sup>10</sup> and in the course of time his office became hereditary.

Virtually all the land belonged to the temple and it was administered by the ENSI with the concurrence of the bureaucracy. The area under cultivation was divided into three parts, the first of which was the "Lord's Field," meant to provide for the maintenance of the temple and the cult and amounting, at least in one case, to about a quarter of the arable land belonging to the temple. Then there was the "Field of Maintenance," allotted to those engaged in the service of the temple, and lastly the "Field of Labour," leased out on rent which was payable from the harvest.<sup>11</sup> The quantity, which in the Early Dynastic Period (about 2850-2500)<sup>12</sup> was very low, coming to about one-eighth or one-seventh of the crop, rose, in the age of the Third Dynasty of

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9. The expression Predynastic is also used by specialists. The development of writing among the Sumerians is briefly discussed in the writer's article "Sumerian Religious Lyric" (to appear in *The Living Word*).

10 The earlier reading PATESI has been shown to be without justification. The king was known as LUGAL among the Sumerians, apparently "big (GAL) man" (LU), and in script the word consisted of the figure of a man with the crown (crown-man?).

11 Since the city-state and the temple were originally synonymous, it would seem that what is had in the division of land described here is a type of state capitalism (or socialism): the means of production belong to the state. Most of the information we have about the temple-centred economy of the early Sumerian times comes from the city of Lagash and from one of its temples dedicated to the goddess Bau.

12 A *caveat* must be added here about dates since the reader will come across in professional works chronological indications different from the ones given here; we follow here the so-called "low" chronology, and the variations in dating may very well be



Ur (about 2060-1995),<sup>13</sup> to about one-third. There were too private plots of land where cultivation was carried on, and sheep, pigs, cattle, etc. were raised, the outcome of which was the development of private enterprise coupled with the accumulation of wealth in private hands.

The ENSI began appropriating to himself as much power as possible and treated the temple lands as his own private property. The persons who felt the brunt of his ambition were the citizens who were forced to pay heavy taxes to both the ENSI and the temple bureaucrats, and there arose a class of shrewd individuals who were wont to make loans to the poor and then get back the loan, at the time most favourable to them, with exorbitant interest, thus reducing the debtor to dire poverty and misery. Some Russian scholars speak of a struggle between ENSI, who was encroaching upon the temple lands, and the conservative clergy and the aristocracy who demanded autonomy for the temple estates.<sup>14</sup> The economic crisis became so acute that the dynasty of Ur-Nanshe which had been ruling the city-state of Legash from about 2500 onwards collapsed under its impact.

A strenuous effort at social reform was made by Urukagina (shortly before 2350) who, thirteen years after the fall of the Ur-Nanshe dynasty, had come to power. In an inscription he refers to the economic ills of his time and enumerates the various measures he had enacted to end exploitation.<sup>15</sup> He forbade priests

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illustrated with the help of a concrete example, namely, the date of Hammurabi:

The "ultra-high" chronology	- 1900 or so
The "high" chronology	- 1848-1806
The "low" chronology	- 1728-1686
The "ultra-low" chronology	- 1704-1662

13 This was a period of Sumerian revival marked by a most vigorous literary activity (details in the article referred to in n. 9).

14 Cf. Diakonoff, "Some Remarks on the 'Reforms' of Urukagina," *Revue d'Assyriologie* 52 (1958) pp. 1-15 (p. 12); cf. too n. 15.

15 Pioneering study on the economic situation in Urukagina's age, A. Deimel, *Sumerische Tempelwirtschaft zur Zeit Urukaginas*



to go to the garden of a farmer, fell trees and carry off the fruits; the landholder was forbidden to take away a tenant's ass which bore a foal without paying him, and if the owner was unwilling to sell the animal the lord should not beat him. The landed gentry and the aristocracy should not catch fish from a pond made by an ordinary citizen. Urukagina reduced the taxes citizens had to pay at the time of marriage, divorce, death and burial, but his reform failed to produce the desired effect and to give stability and strength to Lagash, so that he was finally overthrown by Lugalzagesi, the ruler of the rival city of Umma who was in turn routed by Sargon of Accad, a Semite who established a highly centralized empire (2350-2160).

We shall not touch upon the economic situation in the Old Accadian Period (2350-2160) but instead round off our study of the third millennium with a brief account of the final stage of Sumerian history. After the collapse of the empire of Accad the Sumerians staged a come-back under the leadership of Ur-Nammu of Ur (about 2060-47) who established a compact and centralized power-structure which, in professional jargon, is known as the Third Dynasty of Ur. There was an economic boom, coupled with a hectic building activity, and promotion of agriculture: Ur-Nammu himself promulgated a code of laws.<sup>16</sup> He claims that he removed from the city exploiters, grafters and grabbers of citizens' donkeys, oxen and sheep, enforced right measures, and made special provisions so that "the orphan did not fall a prey to the powerful, the widow did not fall a prey to the wealthy, and the man of one shekel did not fall a prey to

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*und seiner Vorgänger* (Orientalia 2, Rome, 1931); cf. too M. Lambert, "Les 'réformes' d'Urukagina," *Revue d'Assyriologie* 50 (1956) pp. 169-84; "Documents sur le § 3 des 'réformes' d'Urukagina," *ibid.* 51 (1957) pp. 139-44; cf. further Lambert, "La période présargonique. La vie économique à Shuruppak," *Sumer* 9 (1953) pp. 198-213; 10 (1954) pp. 150-90.

16 Cf. S. N. Kramer-A. Falkenstein, "Ur-Nammu Law Code," *Orientalia* 23 (1954) pp. 40-51; cf. too Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer* (Double day Anchor Books, New York, 1959) pp. 51-55.



the man of one mina" (= 60 shekels).<sup>17</sup> Under Ibbi-Suen (1799–55), the last ruler of Ur III, the land was inundated by Semites from the West, or the Amorites, who also brought about a complete disruption of the economy. According to contemporary documents inflation had become so severe that the price of barley and fish rose by 50–60%! Here we have a clear instance of a modern phenomenon, namely, the economics of scarcity.

What we have given above is a very brief and *jeune* account of the economic conditions of Western Asia in the third millennium. A similar account of the second and first millennia cannot be attempted here for lack of space, and so we shall now pass on to some other aspects of the problem. Rulers were fully aware of the need of a healthy economy, and hence in the law codes there were inserted special provisions governing economic transactions. The code of King Lipit-Ishtar (1875–65) includes clauses dealing with orchards, felling of trees, stealing, etc. In the prologue to the code the ruler claims: "I procured... the freedom of the sons and daughters of Nippur, the sons and daughters of Ur, the sons and daughters of Isin, the sons and daughters of Sumer and Accad upon whom... slaveship... has been imposed".<sup>18</sup> The most important code of antiquity is doubtless the one of Hammurabi (1728–1684)<sup>19</sup> which includes clauses regarding rates of hire and wages, land and houses, agriculture etc. Another code, smaller in size than that of Hammurabi but antedating it by at least a century is the collection known as the Laws of Eshnunna.<sup>20</sup> The remarkable thing about it is that it gives the controlled price of such basic consumer goods as

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17 Kramer, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

18 Translation of the code in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (abbr. *ANET* 2nd ed., Princeton, 1956) pp. 159–61 (the passage cited is from the prologue; *ANET*, p. 159b).

19 Transliterated text, translation, philological notes and exhaustive legal commentary in G. R. Driver–J. C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws I–II* (Oxford, 1960); cf. too *ANET*, pp. 163–80.

20 Edited by A. Goetze, *The Laws of Eshnunna* (Annual of the American School of Oriental Research 31, New Haven, 1956); *ANET*. pp. 161–3.



barley, various types of oil, lard, wool, salt, spices and copper. Lastly it is necessary to refer to the Hittite code<sup>21</sup> which also treats of rates of pay for various services.

Had all the laws been translated into practice, there would certainly have come into existence an equitable social order, and from the numerous records of cases unearthed in Mesopotamia it is clear that the laws did not always remain a dead letter.<sup>22</sup> A most unusual thing is that private Hittite documents have not been found, so that we have no way of knowing how the legal stipulations were applied in individual cases. Shrewd and unscrupulous people could circumvent the provisions of law, and they certainly made capital out of its loopholes, which, incidentally, is also a feature of modern times.

A few words must be added here about slavery. In the Early Dynastic Period slaves were never an important constituent of Mesopotamian society, and the ones who were employed by the state were generally prisoners of war.<sup>23</sup> The earliest custom was to put prisoners to death, but with the progress of culture they

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21 Text in transcription with introduction and commentary by J. Friedrich, *Die hethitischen Gesetze. Transkription, Uebersetzung, sprachliche Erläuterungen und vollständiges Wörterverzeichnis* (Documenta et monumenta orientis antiqui 7, 2nd ed., Leiden, 1971); F. Imperati, *Le leggi ittite* (Incunabula graeca 7, Rome, 1964); cf. too *ANET*, pp. 188-97.

22 There are several works which either contain the original documents or deal with them from the point of view of legal history; for the Summerian period, cf. Edzard, *Sumerische Recht-surkunden des III. Jahrtausends aus der Zeit von der III. Dynastie on Ur* (Abhandlungen der Bayerischen Akad. . . 67, Munich, 1966), Falkenstein, *Die neusumerischen Gerichtsurkunden I-III* (Abhandlungen der Bayerischen Akad. . . , 39, 40, 44, Munich, 1956-57); vol. II gives the documents in transcription with translation and commentary.

23 Cf. Gelb, "Prisoners of War in Early Mesopotamia", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 32 (1973) pp. 70-98. In the sources prisoners are denoted by the Sumerogram LU+KAR (to be read SHAGA or SHE); the term for slave in Sumerian is NITA,



came to be employed as a labour force. Slaves were procured by the Sumerians by raids into the hill country, and hence the logogram for slave girl (woman) was SAL. KUR, "woman (SAL) of the mountain" (KUR). From the Ur III Period onwards we see free citizens being reduced to the condition of slaves; these were either men who sold themselves as slaves because of penury and debt, or children sold by needy parents. There was also the custom of creditors seizing debtors and selling them as slaves. Importation of slaves from abroad is taken for granted by the code of Hammurabi.

Slaves were really chattels and though in the early Sumerian period they never had any distinctive mark, from the Old Babylonian Period (1860-1530) onwards they wore, it would seem, a distinctive tonsure.<sup>24</sup> Branding and tattooing too were practised, particularly when there was a question of slaves who had the tendency to run away, and in the first millennium the custom of putting marks on slaves dedicated to temples became widespread.

Mesopotamian slavery was never an inhuman institution like the caste system of India, nor was it anything dehumanizing and cruel like its counterpart in the Roman world. Slaves could win their freedom, acquire and own property (which they could also use to buy their own freedom), and even marry free women. It is true that the male members of a household could take female slaves as concubines, but at times contracts included the provision that slaves sold in slavery should be given in marriage, most of the time to a slave, and it was at times stipulated that there should be remarriage if their husbands died young. All this is doubtless proof of the humane element in the economic system of ancient Mesopotamia.

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literally, "male," its equivalent in Accadian being *wardu* (also *ardu*); compare NITA. KUR, "male from the mountain," (male slave), NAM. NITA (= Accadian *ardûtu*), "slavery," etc.

<sup>24</sup> Priests and apparently also doctors wore the tonsure. On the matter of tonsuring slaves the following clause taken from an early code is explicit: "If a son says to his father, 'You are not my father,' (the father) may give him a tonsure, put a slave mark on him and sell him" (cf. H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness that Was Babylon* [Mentor Books, New York, 1968] p. 203).



In addition to slaves Mesopotamian society included two more classes, known in technical language as *awîlum mushkênum*,<sup>25</sup> which are mentioned often by the code of Hammurabi. The former class was made up of free citizens who had the right to own property and who were not obliged to give special services to the state, whereas the latter group, though owing land, had to tender some specified services. This tripartite division of society will certainly remind one of the social classes among the Indo-Europeans.<sup>26</sup>

A short discussion on the labour force in Mesopotamia is quite in place here. Temples, to begin with, had attached to them a considerable productive but cheap labour force, the most important source of information about it being the ration lists (on the ration system, cf. below) going as far back as the Fara Period.<sup>27</sup> These contain catalogues of GEME. DUMU (= women-children) personnel. There are women listed as widows, old people, and particularly old women (who, in the system of rationing were put on a par with children), female prisoners of war,

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25 Legal discussions in the first volume of Driver-Miles (n. 19 above); cf. too E. A. Speiser, "The *mushkênum*," *Oriental and Biblical Studies. Collected Writings of E. A. Speiser* (Philadelphia, 1967) pp. 332-43.

26 Cf. our contribution, "Social Classes: the Indo-European Tradition", in the current number of *Jeevadhara*. Outside Mesopotamia too there was tripartition of society: thus documents from Alalah in Syria make mention of three classes bearing the names *mariannu*, *ehelena* and *šabu namê*. The first word, which is actually Sanskrit *marya*-, young man, young warrior," with the Hurrian suffix *-nnu*, designates chariot warriors who formed the highest social class and whose status was hereditary. The second term is Hurrian in origin and is used of people settled on the king's lands (who are also called by the Accadian name *shuzûbutum*); the third group which was subject to conscription lived outside the city and their settlements were known as *nawûm*, "encampment," in the sources.

27. This site, known in antiquity as Shuruppak, was an important Sumerian centre (on the economic life of this city, cf. the study of Lambert referred to in n. 15 above).



and ex-voto women, in short, all those who had no male provider, or were without means of subsistence. Children mentioned in the catalogues range from babies being nursed to those who were close to maturity. They include orphans and those born out of wedlock. All these had to work for the temple, and in return received food and lodging.

There were also cloisters or nunneries attached to temples which used to house large contingents of women. A Sargonic text<sup>28</sup>, for example, lists by name 585 women along with 105 men, all working in a weaving factory at Eshnunna. The males represent only an auxiliary labour force, as is borne out by the fact that the establishment is called E. GEME, "women's household," which had at the helm E. GI4, a "prioress"<sup>29</sup> Since there is no mention in the text of children, one can conclude that the women were either unmarried or widows, who are best compared to the classes of women called LUKUR (SAL. ME) and *nadîtum*. These were supposed to be "sterile,"<sup>30</sup> and their bearing of children was even regarded as an evil portent. It was they who took care of the children attached to the temple's labour force.

It was also customary in ancient Mesopotamia to offer as ex-voto to temples not only raw materials (wool, bitumen), objects (rings, boats) and animals (cattle, sheep, goats and equids) but also women and children. Sumerian texts use the expressions

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28. Cf. Gelb, "The Arua Institution," *Revue d'Assyriologie* 66 (1972) pp. 1-32: interestingly enough, the custom under consideration was prevalent in ancient India as well (Gelb, *ibid.*, p. 11, with appeal to W. Ruben *Die Lage der Sklaverei in der altindischen Gesellschaft* Sitzungsbericht der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Klasse für Sprache, Literatur und Kunst 1955/2, Berlin. 1957 p. 74).

29. To this term corresponds, in the sources, Accadian *kallatum*, literally, "bride," but such a meaning does not suit the context.

30. Compare the case of the vestal virgins in Rome. It has been argued that these women were sterilized, or, in the case of unwanted pregnancy, were made to undergo abortion. This latter practice was current in Assyria, though it was there punishable with death. Of compulsory sterilization there is no proof.



A. RU. A and A. MU. RU (in Accadian translation *ishruk*), "he gave ex-voto," and when human beings were themselves the offering what was involved was the getting rid of unwanted persons.<sup>31</sup> The temple thus became a collecting centre for the poor, the destitute, the rejected and the outcast, who could earn a living by giving their services to the sanctuary. "The temple, by receiving these individuals, fulfils the duty of taking care of the weak and unwanted – as so often emphasized by Mesopotamian kings speaking of providing help to the widows and orphans...; in return, the temple obtains cheap labor which assures its economic life."<sup>32</sup> What is found in the A. RU. A system is the fruitful exploitation of the labour potential of the penurious and the helpless and the alleviation of their misery, and in spite of the undeniable use of humans as chattels, the custom must be evaluated positively as it gave some sort of economic security to groups who would otherwise have had to starve or beg.

Mesopotamia also had serfs, constituting a major labour force. They worked either part-time or fulltime for the state, the temple, or the big capitalists of the land who were also as a rule officials of the crown. Called GURUS in the Sumerian documents, the serfs were semi-free and as such should not be considered as chattel slaves; they constituted a vast mass of humanity comprising semi-free labourers, small peasants and artisans or craftsmen who were really poor but had their own families, and earned their livelihood from tiny plots of land allotted to them by the crown, the sanctuary or the rich. They had to labour for their patron during part of the year, while at other times they were free to work on their own land. Lawgivers of Mesopotamia had in view the protection of the rights of these when they determined wages, etc.

Marxist scholars distinguish between public (state) and private sectors in the economy of ancient Mesopotamia. They

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31. Of course, this is a mild and humane form of exposure of the unwanted or the undesirable resorted to not only by the poor but also by the rich. It is reminiscent of the custom prevalent in the Middle Ages (nay, even now is!) of sending unwanted boys and girls to monasteries and nunneries.

32. Cf: Gelb, op. cit. (n. 28) p. 11.



also stress that there was common holding of land (communes), on which laboured the members of the community who were organized into patriarchal families which in their turn formed part of larger patriarchal clans. Non-Marxists, however, regard the community of land as "wishful dreaming about the 'Golden Age' ...," and reject too the distinction between the two sectors as an arbitrary projection back into history of Marxist ideology.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore since the rations were supplied only for a few months of the year, it follows that the labourers had, for the rest of the year, to fend for themselves. This would not have been the case if they had permanent employment.

We shall bring this section to a close with a brief account of the system of rationing prevalent among the Sumerians, a system going back to the Fara Period (cf. above). Documents make mention of SHE. BA, ZIZ. BA, NINDA. BA and SIG. BA, expressions which are generally rendered rations (BA)<sup>34</sup> of barley (SHE), corn (ZIZ), bread (NINDA) and wool (SIG). The most important of the items listed here is SHE. BA which, by extension, came to include rations of oil (I), fish (KU<sub>6</sub>), dates (ZU. LUM; and U. HU. IN), peas (GU. TUR), etc. The recipients of these allowances were old persons (males as well as females), grown-up ones of both the sexes, immature children and even infants. The system of rations disappeared in the course of the second millennium, and the card-holders were gradually displaced by classes of artisans who worked for wages and by small-scale farmers who owned land, paid taxes and performed services for the palace.

## II

Of all the lands of ancient Western Asia only Iran proved to be the scene of a veritable economic liberation movement, with the masses taking an active part in it. This is conventionally known as the Mazdakite movement or the Mazdakite heresy<sup>35</sup>.

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33. Thus Gelb, "From Slavery to Freedom" (n. 2. above), p. 89.

34. It is not right to regard BA as wages, though this has at times been done.

35. Details in F. Altheim, *Ein asiatischer Staat. Feudalismus unter den Sasaniden und ihren Nachbarn* (Wiesbaden, 1954) pp. 189ff. A. Christensen, *Le regne du roi Kawadh I et le commu-*



The Achæmaenid empire (roughly 600-330) was dealt a death blow by Alexander the Great, and for nearly a century Iran remained without a native dynasty, but shortly after 250 B. C. there commenced a revival headed by Arsaces I (247-?). The royal line he inaugurated- the Arsacid line- ruled Iran till about 230 A. D., when the Sasanian dynasty<sup>36</sup> (230-651) came to power. The Sasanian state was feudalistic, and Mazdakism was an attempt to eliminate completely an oppressive type of social order, and to replace it with an equitable one.

The leader of the revolutionary movement was a man named Mazdak<sup>37</sup> whose origins are shrouded in obscurity. He got the support of king Kavād (488-531) who was hostile to the powerful nobility, but this brought about his downfall: the nobles and the clergy staged a coup, ousted Kavād, tried and imprisoned him, and installed his brother Jāmāsp as king.<sup>38</sup> This happened in 496

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*nisme mazdakite* (Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, Hist. fil. Meddelelser 9/VI. Copenhagen, 1925) Marxist presentation in O. Klima, *Mazdak. Geschichte einer sozialen Bewegung im sassanidischen Persien* (Prag, 1957). Convenient summary in R. A. Nicholson, "Mazdak," *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* VIII, pp. 508-10. On feudalism in Iran, with special reference to Indo-European traditions, cf. G. Widengren, *Der Feudalismus im alten Iran* (Wissenschaftliche Abhandlungen der Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen 40, Cologne, 1969).

36. The [basic work on Sasanian history is Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides* (Annales du Musée Guimet 48, repr., Paris, 1971). For all practical purposes, cf. R. N. Frye, *The Heritage of Persia* (Mentor Books, New York, (1966) pp. 235-62.

37. He is said to have been the son of Bāmād. According to Syriac sources the founder of the sect bore the name Zarādu-sht and was the son of Khurragān; the same documents use of his followers the epithet *Zarāduštakān*, "Zarāduštakās".

38. This is the Middle Persian form of Younger Avestan *Jāmāspa*, Gothic *Dejāmāspa* (*aspa*- = Sanskrit *aśva*-, "horse," "*Dejāmā*- remains obscure).



but he escaped from prison, fled to the Hephthalite court,<sup>39</sup> and in 499, with the help of the army supplied by his hosts, staged a come-back, of course as a converted man. The Mazdakites now began resorting to extreme measures, and their opposition to the appointment of Chosroes I surnamed Anosharvan, "the Blessed" (531-78), as crown prince brought about a complete rupture. In the controversy with the revolutionaries Kavad had the support of the Zoroastrian and Christian clergy, and in 528, under the instigation of Chosroes, he brutally murdered Mazdak and slaughtered his followers wholesale. Those of the Mazdakites who escaped death went underground, but their ideas, which understandably enough had great popularity among the masses, began to spread in secret and were responsible for later disturbances as well.

The writings of the revolutionaries were consigned to the flames, so that our entire knowledge of the movement is derived from second-hand and biased sources. The first thing that Mazdak claimed was that he was proclaiming afresh the pure doctrine of Zarathushtra.<sup>40</sup> The great poet Firdausi puts into the mouth of the leader the utterance,<sup>41</sup>

"I will establish this<sup>42</sup> in order that the pure religion  
May be manifested and raised from obscurity.

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39. These were part of that wave of nomads from central Asia who are generally known as the Huns. They were allowed by Shapur II (309-79) to settle down on Kushan territory on the eastern borders of his empire, and when at the beginning of the fifth century Iran was quite weak, they began to expand westwards into Iranian territory and eastwards into India. There is a highly technical work on the Hephthalites and their impact upon Iran, viz, F. Altheim-R. Stiehl, *Geschichte der Hunnen*. Bd, 2: *Die Hephthaliten in Iran*, Mit Beiträgen von Z. I. Jamolski, E. Lozovan, F. Prinzessin von Sachsen-Meiningen, E. Trautmann-Nehring (2nd ed., Berlin, 1969).

40. Cf. Luke, "The Tragedy of Freedom: Man in the Thought of Zarathushtra," *Jeevadhara* (1975) pp. 148-62.

41. The texts given here are cited from Nicholson's article (n. 35).

42. That is, the new communistic order.







reforms, but death prevented him from translating them into practice. His successor Chosroes, as soon as he ascended the throne, restored to the nobles the property seized by the Mazdakites, and the state assumed full responsibility for the maintenance of the women and children uprooted and displaced by the revolution. Reforms were undertaken to improve the condition of the masses. Taxes were fixed afresh according to yield. Canals, roads and bridges were repaired, and livestock lost during the turmoil were restored. All these measures, we have to confess, were not wholly altruistic. They had in view the filling of the royal coffers, a goal that could be realized only when the masses were granted the bare minimum of facilities.<sup>44</sup>

.....

The endeavour to create an equitable social order can be said to be virtually as old as the urban age heralded by the Sumerians. and there is not the least doubt that the efforts made by the noble-minded spirits of ancient Western Asia did produce some effects. There is a general persuasion that the Semites, unlike the Sumerians and the Hittites, were men who found some sort of sadistic delight in cruelty, a persuasion in which there is some truth. The Assyrians, for instance, treated their enemies with inhuman cruelty, but even they showed themselves humane in their dealings with their own slaves. We can have some idea of the sense of security enjoyed by slaves in Mesopotamia if we but

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44, A modern authority has written: "The fiscal reforms of Chosroes I were concerned less with the general welfare than with the interest of the exchequer, and the state of oppression and ignorance in which the people lived drove them to revolt. This was nothing new in the ancient world, which had already experienced upheavals in Egypt, Greece and Rome. But whereas the revolution that shook the Hellenistic world were the work of slaves and debtors, the Mazdakite movement ... had a social as well as economic basis, and for this reason is called communist ... The civilization of the Sassanian State might dazzle the eye..., but its social structure was rotten, and this delivered the country into the arms of the conqueror. It proved powerless against the Arab invader" (R. Ghirshman, *Iran from the Earliest Times to the Islamic Conquest* [Baltimore, 1965] p. 346).



compare their position with that of Roman slaves. In the age of Augustus a certain capitalist is said to have been, at the time of death, in possession of 4,000 slaves! Worse still, the blood-thirsty Romans used slaves in gladiatorial shows and revelled in seeing their blood shed, which is a thing unheard of in ancient Western Asia. In Rome beautiful female slaves used to be raped at will by their owners, and often were sold at public auction. The Romans used to chain their slaves at night, and those working on the galleys were always fettered to their vessels. When led for heavy work in the fields, and mines they used to be driven under the lash, and there was once a time when a slave could be put to death at the whims of his master. There were also masters who were really benevolent and showed genuine affection for their slaves, though they ever remained a minority. At times slaves were set free, and these freedmen constituted a special class in Rome. Incidentally, Plato the humanist and the idealist condemned slavery altogether, but Aristotle the realist and others endorsed it as something necessary for society's well-being.

In Western Asia we hear of slaves running away from their masters but never of a common rebellion, whereas in the Roman world there occurred revolts of slaves in 134 B. C. and in 102 B. C. The year 73 B. C. witnessed an insurrection in Italy under the leadership of the gladiator Spartacus, and all the uprisings were crushed with a cruelty, the bare remembrance of which freezes the blood. To the credit of the ancient Western Asians it must be said that they never engaged in the type of slave trade that the Arabs and Christians carried on between the 16th and the 19th centuries. It is to their credit again that their social order never included the caste system. A comparison of the codes of Western Asia with those of Manu will show clearly how dehumanizing and debasing the latter was with its caste laws.<sup>45</sup>

A thing we do come across in the ancient world is the absence of an able leadership that could arouse in the masses a conscious awareness of their own rights and help them to fight

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45. The excessive severity of Manu's Code stands in sharp contrast to the gentleness and mildness of the Hittite laws which, in all truth, represent the genuine Indo-European tradition.



for them. The Mazdakite revolution, so often extolled by Marxist scholars, was more a religio-economic movement than a revolution of masses who were conscious of their rights as human beings. Indeed the awareness of one's rights as a person had not yet dawned upon the ancients, and if at all it has arisen in the West (with a pronouncedly anti-Christian tinge) after the industrial revolution and thence has spread to the third world, it is, paradoxically, due to the influence of Christianity. It is the Christian faith that has made man aware of his eminent worth and value as a person with the right to enjoy the good things the Father in heaven has provided for him. From the historical point of view the conditions in Western Asia we have outlined above served as a prelude to the Christian message regarding man's economic liberation.

Calvary  
Trichur - 680004

K. Luke



# Social Classes: the Indo-European Tradition

India's caste system has been one of the worst tools of exploitation history has ever produced<sup>1</sup>, and the most tragic thing about it is that it is an instance of the gradual degradation and corruption of something that originally was intended to promote man's well-being. In fact, the grouping of men into three distinct classes on the basis of the tasks they had to perform for the smooth functioning of society was a peculiar feature of ancient Indo-European communities. Of all the peoples of antiquity only the Indo-Europeans had evolved what Georges Dumézil has called "l'idéologie tripartite", the tripartite ideology,<sup>2</sup> in order to give a theoretical justification for their social set-up. In this study, a succinct account is given of what the sources have to say about the three classes, and then an exposition of the religious significance the Indo-European peoples attached to trifunctionalism. Needless to say, the traditions of the Indo-Iranians will loom large in our discussions.

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1. Several factors have contributed to this development, from among which we would like to single out one, namely, the serious threat that Islam posed to the very existence of Hinduism: the strict enforcement of caste laws was a potent means of survival.

2. Dumézil has expressed his views on this peculiar ideology in a long series of articles and monographs which are listed in J. Puhvel (ed.), *Myth and Law among the Indo-Europeans. Studies in Indo-European Comparative Mythology* (Publications of the University of California Center for the Study of Comparative Folklore and Mythology 1, Los Angeles, 1970) pp. 250-59 (1924-1969). Earlier listings are found in C. S. Littleton, *The New Comparative Mythology: an Anthropological Assessment of the Theories of Georges Dumézil* (Berkeley, 1966); *Hommages à Georges Dumézil* (Collection Latomus 45, Brussels, 1960.)



## I

To begin with, we have an account of the social structure prevalent among the Gauls and Celts.<sup>3</sup> Julius Caesar, who had first-hand knowledge of ancient Gaul (=France), reports that Celtic society as it existed in the first century B.C. consisted of the three orders of *druides*, *equites* and *plebes*.<sup>4</sup> The druids were engaged in things sacred, conducted public and private sacrifices, and had the last word on everything connected with religion. They were accustomed to spend a good deal of time in learning by heart a large number of verses, which, incidentally, they would never put down in black and white even though they knew the art of writing and were making use of the Greek script. The order of knights quite naturally followed the profession of war, and while these two groups possessed rank and dignity, the third one, namely, the vast mass of commons, remained in the condition of slaves, without daring to undertake anything and

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3. The name Gaul is a modification of Latin *Galli*, the inhabitants of *Gallia*: here belongs too Greek *Galatai*, "Galatians" (cf. the New Testament), the tribes settled in *Galatia* (Asia Minor = Asiatic Turkey), along with its variant *Keltoi* (Latin *Celtae*, whence Celt, Celtic). The term goes back to the Indo-European base *gal-* (*ghal-*), "to be powerful, able", derivatives of which occur in Lithuanian, Old Slavic, and in some Celtic dialects. For a popular introduction, cf. T. G. E. Powell, *The Celts* (Ancient Peoples and Places Series, London, 1958); on religion and mythology, cf. P. MacCana, *Celtic Mythology* (London, 1970) J. Vendreys, *La religion des Celtes* ("Mana." Introduction à l'histoire des religions 2/III, Paris, 1948). J. de Vries, *Keltische Religion* (Die Religionen der Menschheit 18, Stuttgart, 1961).

4. From the etymological point of view, in *druides* (<*dru-vid-es*) the second element (-*vid-*) is related to Sanskrit *veda* (verb) *veda-* (noun), Greek *Foida* Latin *vidi* (<*voidai*), etc.; the druid is therefore the one who is in possession of sacred knowledge. It was the Indo-Europeans who domesticated the horse (in the parent-language *eqwos*, whence Sanskrit *aiva-*, Greek *hippos*, Latin *equus*, etc.); the *equites* (cf. Greek *hippotēs*) are those who ride on horses. The *plēbes* (originally *plēdhwes*, from the base *plē-*, "to be full;" cf. *plē-nus*) were the masses, the teeming anonymous crowds of common folk as distinct from the *nobiles* who naturally were few in number.



without being admitted to deliberations. In his account of the *plebes* Caesar is undoubtedly guided by the knowledge he had of the condition of slaves in Rome.

The traditions recorded by Caesar are continental ones, which however, receive ample support from early Irish (or insular) sources: these attest the division of society into *druidh* (druids), *flatha* (warrior nobles) and *bó-airigh* (herdsmen-farmers).<sup>5</sup> Another type of tripartition too flourished among the Irish, comprising the three orders of *druidh*, *flidh* and *baird*.<sup>6</sup> The second group, whose name is generally rendered "poets," used to exercise druidic functions and were also in possession of special privileges, and whereas the druids gradually disappeared with the spread of Christianity, the poets succeeded in making some sort of compromise with the Church and continued to flourish down to the seventeenth century when their order died out under British rule.

The special form of tripartition just described had as its principal goal the preservation and transmission of sacred lore. The nature and work of the second order, which, on the continent, was known by the name *vātis*,<sup>7</sup> are not altogether clear, though

5. Cf. MacCana, *op. cit.*, pp. 14f. The spelling given here is the modern one; *flatha*, Old Irish *flaith*, "rule, ruler, lord" (cf. Gallic name *Vlatos*, "ruler") is etymologically related to Latin *valeō* and Tocharian *lānt*, *lānte* (< *wlθ-nt*), "king," etc. The element *bó* in the third term corresponds to Sanskrit *go-* (cf. the Irish name *Bo-land* and its equivalent Sanskrit *Go-vind-*), and *airigh* is a derivative of Indo-European *ar(ə)-*, the base surviving in Latin *aró*, "to plough" (*arātor*, "ploughman"); the *bo-airigh* is therefore the "cow-plough-man."

6. The second term (pre-Irish *velitas* < *welēts* from the base *wel-* (cf. its derivative in Latin *voltus vultus*) means "seer, prophet" (cf. *Veleda*, the name of a prophetess), and the third one (Gallico-Latin *bardus*, Old Irish *bard*), from *gwer-*, "to lift up the voice, sing, praise," is related to Sanskrit *gr̥ṇāti*, *gr̥ṇāte*, "sings, praises," Latin *grātēs*, *grātus*, *grātia*, etc.

7. The word is written in Greek characters. It is of Indo-European origin and, in Latin, was originally the designation of poets. Paul Thieme has shown that the *R̥gveda* employs the base *vat-*. "to breathe into, inspire" (cf. his contribution "Die Wurzel *vat-*", *Asiatica. Festschrift Friedrich Weller* [Leipzig, 1954] pp. 656-66; reprinted in R. Schmidt, *Indogermanische Dichtersprache* [Wege der Forschung 165, Darmstadt, 1968] pp. 187-202); cf. too



we know that members of the group were in the habit of acting as seers, teachers, advisers to rulers, witnesses of contracts, and so forth. The *baird* or bards, finally, were men whose task it was to sing heroic poetry, songs in praise of rulers and their exploits, etc., and all through history they have been regarded as an inferior class.

Coming now to Roman society, we find that it too was tripartite, consisting of *flāmines*, *milites* and *quirites*.<sup>8</sup> The priest of any particular godhead could be addressed as *flāmen*, and fifteen of them have been listed by tradition, beginning with the one of Jupiter who was the highest and ending with the one of Pomona who was the least in the series. In the period of the empire, when rulers began to be deified, all those who had been accorded apotheosis had their own special priests. The *milites* constituted the very backbone of Roman power, and the *quirites*, were originally inhabitants of the Sabine town of Cures, but after the Romans and the Sabines coalesced into one community, the former assumed the title *quirites*, though only in a civil capacity. There was in use among the Romans the stereotyped expression *populus romanus quiritem*, "the Roman commonwealth of Quirite Citizens, or "the Roman nation of Quirites".

The priestly group consisted of three orders called *flāmines majores*, viz, *flāmen diālis*, *flamen martiālis*, and *flamen quirinālis*,<sup>9</sup>

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Luke, "Vedic Inspiration in the Light of Indo-European Traditions," *Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures* (Bangalore, 1975) pp. 366-83.

8. The second and third terms are borrowed from the Etruscan language, while the first is of Indo-European origin; being a derivative of *bhlad-(s)men* (neuter action noun), "action of offering sacrifice," and subsequently, "he who offers sacrifice" (masculine agent noun).

9. The third adjective is from Etruscan; *diālis* goes back to Latin *diēspiter* (= Sanskrit *dyāuspitar-*, Greek *Zeus patēr*, etc.) which in its turn presupposes Indo-European *dyēuspatar-*, "heaven-father." The archaic poetical name of the god Mars (whence the adjective *martialis*) was *Māvors*, and still more archaic is the form *Marmor* occurring in the prayer of an ancient priestly group (cf. n. 27 below.)



set apart for the service respectively of Jupiter, Mars and Quirinus, three gods representing sovereignty, military power, and agricultural pursuits. Quirinus, though identified with Romulus in the early ages of Roman history, was subsequently regarded, under the influence of syncretism, as the tranquil and peaceful aspect of Mars, the god of war; it was thus that he came to be associated with the agrarian *quirites*.

In one of his monographs Dumézil<sup>10</sup> has, on the basis of philological considerations, suggested that *flāmen* and *Brahman*<sup>11</sup> are cognate forms, a contention which, purely from a grammatical viewpoint, is possible. He also refers to a fixed set of taboos and norms regarding ritual purity that governed the life and conduct of these two groups: they were forbidden to engage in physical combat, and to undress completely; they could never be executed, no matter what or how heinous their crime was, and they never had anything to do with horses which played such an important part in warfare. This parallelism is certainly not the result of chance but rather something derived from the common heritage of prehistorical times.

Another bit of evidence of tripartition is furnished by the tradition regarding the origin of the three orders of *Ramnes* or *Ramnenses*, the *Taties* or *Tatienses*, and the *Luceres*, corresponding roughly to the Latins or Romans, the Sabines and the Etruscans.<sup>12</sup> Popular fancy believed that these orders were instituted by Romulus himself, but as far as the historian is concerned, what is of moment is that the belief of the common folk does preserve a vague memory of the tripartite division of Indo-European society in hoary antiquity.

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10. Entitled *Flamen-Brahman* (Annales du Musée Guimet 51, Paris, 1938); detailed summary of the views expressed in this book in Littleton, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-56.

11. On this term, cf. Luke, "Some Aspects of the R̥gvedic Conception of 'Vak-'.<sup>2</sup>" *Jeevadhara* 1 (1971) pp. 176-89.

12. For an account of Roman origins, cf. H. Krahe, *Die Indogermanisierung Griechenlands und Italiens* (Heidelberg, 1949). Excellent summary of the archaeological and linguistic material in L. R. Palmer, *The Latin Language* (The Great Languages, 6th impr., London, 1968) pp. 33-58.



Non-Roman groups in Italy too were cognizant of the trifunctional division of society. The so-called Iguvian Tablets, written in the Umbrian language and containing the description of a ceremonial to be performed in the course of the priests' circuit of the territory around the city of Iguvium (Modern Italian Gubbio),<sup>13</sup> includes a list of six words which form three distinct groups, namely, *nerf arsmo*, *ueiro pequo* and *castruo frif*. In the first phrase *arsmo*<sup>14</sup> means "sacred rite," and *nerf* is the accusative plural of *ner-*, the term corresponding to Greek *anēr*, Sanskrit *nara-*, etc.; the reference here is, then to priests and warriors. The second unit is made up of two nouns whose equivalents in Latin are *vīros* and *pecus*, and in Sanskrit *vīrā-* and *paśu-*, "men" and "cattle."<sup>15</sup> The combination here is very old, going back to the period of Indo-European unity, and it occurs too in the Avesta or the Zoroastrian scriptures in the form *pasu vīra-*, "cattle-men."<sup>16</sup> The elements of the third expression stand for Latin *castra*, "cultivated territory," and *fructus*, "fruit."<sup>17</sup> The second and third units denote, therefore, those groups of men who were engaged in cattle-breeding and agriculture; in other words, the men responsible for the drawing up of the ritual surviving in the Iguvian Tablets were acquainted with a threefold division of society on the basis of the three tasks to be performed by the members of the Umbrian community.

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13. The document has been edited recently by J. W. Poultney, *The Bronze Tablets of Iguvium* (Baltimore, 1959).

14. From *arsmor* (<*admon*), "rite;" compare too "*arsie* (<*adio*), "sancte," *arsmatiam* (<*admatio-*), "ritualem," and *armamu*, "ordinamini;" as can be seen from the original forms cited, the base is *ad-*, "to determine, order".

15. Discussions in R. Schmidt, *Dichtung und Dichtersprache in indogermanischer Zeit* (Wiesbaden, 1967) pp. 215f.

16. Compare the Iranian proper name *Wrps̥h* occurring in the Aramaic documents from Egypt, to be vocalized *Virafsha-* (Schmidt, *op. cit.*, p. 215).

17. Latin *castrum* (<*kas-tro-m*) corresponds to Sanskrit *śastram*, "instrument of (for) cutting," and derivatively "the plot of land cut off from the surrounding area". Cognates of *fructus* occur in Gothic but not in Indo-Iranian.



The traditions of the Greeks are no less clear on the point.<sup>18</sup> According to Greek legend, Ion, the eponymous ancestor of the Ionians, divided society into the four classes of *geōrgoi*, "cultivators of land," *demiourgoi*, "artisans," *hieropoioi*, "priests" and *machmoi*, "warriors". A special division of Attic society mentioned by Herodotus and others is *Geleōn*, *Aigikorēes*, *Argadēs* and *hoplēs*, terms which must be briefly analysed. The last-mentioned title is formed from *hopla*<sup>19</sup>, "arms," and in the derivative sense, "instruments, utensils", and as such denotes artisans. The third name, related to the common noun *argos*<sup>20</sup> "field, ground", must naturally be a descriptive designation of cultivators. The *Aigikorēes* are a group connected with the goddess Athena and the *Geleōn* with Zeus or Jupiter, and they represent therefore "fonctions nobles".<sup>21</sup> Greek tradition, then, visualized the tri-functional existence of society as something that owes its origin to the gods.

Traces of tripartition are found in the myths of the Scythians and Ossetians who were originally Iranian tribes. According to the Scythian myth of creation,<sup>22</sup> a cup, an axe, and a plough with yoke fell from the sky and were picked up by their eponymous ancestor who was the youngest of the three sons of primeval man. These objects undoubtedly symbolize sovereignty,

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18. For discussions, cf. E. Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes* I (Paris, 1969) pp. 279-92 ("La tripartition des fonctions").

19. This is the plural of *hoplon* (from Indo-European *sop-lom*), a *nomen instrumenti* created from the base *hepō*, "to be about, be busy with" (originally *sep-ō*: for the root, cf. Sanskrit *sap-a-ti*, "show love, care, caress").

20. Cognate of Sanskrit *ajra-*, Latin *ager*, etc.

21. Benveniste, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

22. For a popular account of the Scythians, cf. T. T. Rice. *The Scythians* (Ancient Peoples and Places Series, London, 1953). The myth of Scythian origins is discussed by W. Brandenstein, "Die Abstammungssagen der Skythen", *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 52 (1952-3) pp. 183-211. In Indian tradition the Scythians are known as the Sakas; on the name itself, cf. O. Szemerényi, "Iranica," *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 101 (1951) pp. 210-19.



military might and food production; the cup, for example, is closely bound up with the soma cult<sup>23</sup> which played a preponderant part in the worship of the Aryans, and its association with the magico-ritual functions of the clergy needs no special comment. The axe is the weapon warriors use, and lastly the plough remains the distinctive feature of those who work on the land.

The three sons of the first man bear the names *Lipoxais*, *Arpoxais*, and *Kolaxais*, wherein the ending *-xais* is the Greek adaptation of Iranian *-xshathra-xshad-*,<sup>24</sup> "having dominion". *Kolaxis* therefore means, "leading the youth", or "leader of the youth", *Lipoxais*, "leader of the elderly ones", and *Arpoxais*, "leader of the middle-age group",<sup>25</sup> the group whose symbol was the war-axe and who furnished the community with rulers and commanders. What we have in the myth of the origin of the Scythians is, then, a highly specialized form of tripartition.

The Ossetians who now live in the northern regions of the Caucasus and are really descendants of immigrants from Iran<sup>26</sup> have their legends of the *Narts*, i. e., heroes comparable to the Maruts of the Vedic Aryans<sup>27</sup> and the Fiana of the Irish. As for the designation *nart-*, it is the variant of Iranian

23. On this, cf. Luke, "Yajna, the Essence of Ancient Aryan Cult," *The Living Word* 81 (1975) pp. 233-59.

24. On *xshathra-* (= Sanskrit *kṣatra-*), cf. n. 42 below. The second half of the phrase is a verbal element from the root *xshā-*, *xshayati*, "to be able, powerful, rule possess." The combination here occurs in the Avesta as well: *tē narō xshathra xshayante*, "The men rule over kingdoms (in which) there is much to munch (and good) food hidden" (Yasht 17: 7).

25. Brandenstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 201-3.

26. They still speak an Iranian dialect, on which cf. V. A. Abaev, *A grammatical Sketch of Ossetic* (The Hague, 1964). Dumézil, incidentally, is an authority on the language and literature of the Ossetes.

27. These were the storm-gods; their name has not been explained, though there is the possibility that it is a cognate of Mars (cf. n. 9).



*nar-thra-* corresponding to Sanskrit *nṛtu-*, "hero."<sup>28</sup> According to Ossetan mythology there were three families of Narts bearing the names *Alaegatae*, *Aexsaertaekatae* and *Boriatae* respectively, and remarkable for their understanding, might and vigour, and possession of cattle. It should be noted that the second name goes back to *aexsar (t)*—which in turn is a variant of Avestan *xshathra-* (= Sanskrit *kṣatra-*);<sup>29</sup> the attribution of power and courage to this particular family was, then, a simple matter of course.<sup>30</sup>

## II

The scriptures of the Aryan peoples<sup>31</sup> bear out all that has been said above about tripartition of tasks in Indo-European society. The Avesta, in a context dealing with the different sections of humanity forming the political world, speaks of the four *pishtra-*<sup>32</sup> "classes", namely, "the priest, the charioteer (as the chief of warriors), the systematic tiller of the ground, and the artisan" (Yasna 19: 17). Most of the time, however, the texts make mention of three *pishtra-*; here are a few texts chosen at random which illustrate the point: Who was the first priest, the

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28. Not all will accept the interpretation here proposed; however, purely from the morphological point of view. *nṛtu-*, which generally means "dancer," can be derived from *ner-*, "vital power."

29. The greatest Nart was Hamyc, whose wife was the daughter of the sea-god; she left her husband, but only after transferring her pregnancy to him! On his back it took form and shape as excrescence, from which was born the fiery and burning hero Batradz.

30. Elements of tripartition occur in Germanic, Icelandic and Balto-Slavic mythologies; the collective work edited by Puhvel (n. 2) include studies which survey these mythologies.

31. That is, the Indo-Iranians, who alone, of all the Indo-European groups, used the self-designation Aryan; the term is in all likelihood related to Hittite *arawa-* (= Lydian *erua*), "free" (cf. E. Laroche, *Homages à Dumézil*, pp. 124-28) and hence means "free citizen, noble", etc (cf. too Benveniste, *op.cit.*, pp. 367-73).

32. This is a *nomen instrumenti* from the base *paēs-*, "to adorn, colour," which is a cognate of Sanskrit *pimśati*, *piśyate*. The Sanskrit translation of the Avesta uses *vidyā* and *varṇa-* as the equivalent of the technical term under discussion:



first warrior, the first plougher of the ground" (Yasht 13: 88f)? "If the dead one be a priest..., a warrior..., a husbandman..." (Vid. 5: 28). "Can clothes (belonging to a woman with child), when once washed and cleansed, be used... by any priest, warrior or husbandman" (Vid. 5: 57f.)? The dog "has the character of a priest... warrior... husbandman;" the reason for this statement is also indicated: "He eats broken food like a priest (i. e., wandering priest)... He marches in front like a warrior ... He is watchful and sleeps lightly like a husbandman..." (Vid. 13: 44f.). "He shall godly and piously give to the godly man a set of priestly instruments of which the priests make use..., a set of all the war implements of which the warriors make use... a set of all the implements of which the husbandmen make use, as an atonement" (Vid. 14: 8-10). These passages take for granted the tripartition of society on the basis of the three tasks necessary for the community's existence.

The vocabulary of tripartition in the Avesta must be studied closely. The terms used by the writers are *āthrvan-*, *rathaēshtar-* and *vāstrō fshuyant-*, which may sound rather strange to the non-specialist. The word *āthrvan-*, which is the Iranian antecedent of Sanskrit *atharvan-*,<sup>33</sup> occurs in the Avesta as the usual designation of priests. The second name, *rathaēshtar-*,<sup>34</sup> points to a person who takes his stand in the chariot, i. e., the warrior, and the third cluster, a dvandva-compound of *vāstra-*, "pasture",<sup>35</sup> and *fshu-*, "to rear cattle",<sup>36</sup> is doubtless an epithet used of

33. The etymology of the word is not clear.

34. To be analysed as *rathaē+shtar-* (Sanskrit *rathesthā-*); Aryan *ratha-* "chariot," corresponds to Latin *rota*, "wheel," etc. and *shtar-* goes back to the base *stā-* (= Sanskrit *sthā-*, Greek *stē-* in *hī-stē-mi*, etc.)

35. This word, not to be confused with Indo-Iranian *vastra-*, "clothing," is related to *vāstar-*, "shepherd;" the base in the parent-language is *wes-*, "to go to the open land, to lead thither", which survives in the Hittite verb *weshiya-*, "to pasture, feed the flock," and in the noun forms *weshi-*, "pasture" (of cattle), and *wesh tara-*, "shepherd".

36. The form *fshuyant-* is an active present participle, formed from a base related to Sanskrit *paśu-*, Latin *pecus*, etc., so that we can render it *paśumant-* (= Avestan *fshumant-*) or *paśuvant-* (participles).



those engaged in cattle-breeding. The vocabulary of the Avesta points, then, to the existence of three social classes in ancient Iran, to which may also be added a fourth class called *huitish-* and consisting of artisans.<sup>37</sup> It is not required to speak of four social classes since the cultivators of land and craftsmen do not constitute two different groups in society with their own distinctive functions. As a matter of fact, in their case the respective tasks were not so sharply and clearly differentiated as in the case of priests and warriors.

Classical Indian tradition visualizes *caturvarṇa-*,<sup>38</sup> the division of society into four castes each with its own specific duties, as the very basis of thought and activity. That this differentiation goes back to hoary antiquity may be gathered from the fact that the celebrated poem of creation in the first Veda, generally known as *puruṣasūkta-* (10: 90), explicitly refers to them:

“The Brāhman was his mouth,  
Of both his arms was the Rājanya made.  
His thighs became the Vaisya,  
And from his feet the Sūdra was produced” (stanza 12).

The technical terms used by the poet must be carefully analysed.

The priestly caste bears the name *brāhmaṇa-*<sup>39</sup> bearer of the special quality, possessor of the particular ability, denoted by

37. A hapax legomenon from the base *hu-*, “to drive” (cf. Sanskrit *suvati*, *sūta-*).

38. The *Ṛgveda* contrasts the *varṇa-* of the Aryans with that of the dasyus or the natives (2: 12: 4. 3: 34: 9), but there is no question here of caste distinction in the classical sense. Etymologically *varṇa-*, to be analysed as *var+* suffix *na-* (<Indo-European *-no-*) signifies the action of covering or circumscribing; the root *var-* (<Indo-European *wer-*) has as its parallels Latin *operiō* (from earlier *op-wer-yo*), “to cover,” Greek *erusthai*, “to ward off, protect,” Gothic *warjan*, id., etc.; *varṇa-* is therefore a *Gattung*, a category, type.

39. This word occurs 15 times in the *Ṛgveda*, though only once, namely, in the text cited here, is it a caste designation; it is a derivative of *brahmān-* (on the accent, cf. n. 41).



the neuter action noun *brāhman-*.<sup>40</sup> The name of the priestly group, from the point of view of morphology, is a compound of *brāhma-* (which is itself the *vṛddhi*-form of *brahmān-*) and the suffix *-na* which serves to create agent nouns.<sup>41</sup> While referring to the second class the sage does not, for reasons we do not know, employ the usual term *kṣatriya*-<sup>42</sup> but uses instead *rājanya-*, an adjectival form created from *rājan-*, “king, sovereign, prince,” with the help of the suffix *-ya*.<sup>43</sup> the sense accordingly is “royal, kingly, princely,” but when taken as a masculine noun it has two meanings “royal personage, man of the regal or military tribe”. And this is indeed the earliest designation of the second caste. The term *vaiśya-* too, like *rājanya*, is an adjectival formation through *vṛddhi* from *viś-*, “village, settlement,”<sup>44</sup> the *vaiśya-* is therefore the person belonging to the village, the villager, the individual settled on land and engaged in pursuits of agriculture and trade.

The position of the Sūdras in the tripartite scheme is not altogether clear, though they can easily be grouped along with the Vaisyas. Benveniste has pointed out that we do not know the etymology of *śudra*-,<sup>45</sup> and this is true. One is tempted to con-

40. The word originally signified poetical formation and subsequently what was formed by the poet, viz. the sacred utterance, vedic hymn (cf. Luke, “Some Aspects... [n. 11], pp. 186f.).

41. Observe the position of the accent: whereas the neuter action noun has the stress on the root, the masculine agent noun has it on the suffix (detailed discussions in Luke, *The Living word* 79 [1973] pp. 9f.).

42. Compare Avestan *xshathryō* “regens, ruler;” compare too *kṣatriyam* (neuter), “power of the sovereign,” and Avestan *īshā-xshathrya-* (Yasna 29: 9), “with power possessing dominion,” and *ise-xshatryōtāma-* (Yasht 1: 13), “possessing the highest power” (superlative, *kṣyatrottama-*). On the ending *-ya-*, cf. the following note. From the point of view of formation *kṣatra-* is a *nomen instrumenti* created with the help of the suffix *-tra* from the base *ksā-* = Avestan *xsha-* (cf. n. 24 above).

43. The ending *-ya-* (< Indo-European *-yo-*) serves to create adjectives of appurtenance (cf. Greek *patr-io-s*, Latin *patr-iu-s*, etc.) which in the course of time became nouns. |

44. Cognate of Latin *vicus*, Greek *oikos*, etc.

45. *Op. cit.*, p. 288.



nect it with Greek *kudros*,<sup>46</sup> "glorious, illustrious, noble," but this equation is not at all certain. On the other hand there is the fact that the term has the ending *-ra*,<sup>47</sup> found in adjectives and agent nouns formed from verbal roots; compare Sanskrit *śūra-*, "courageous, hero," and Young Avestan *sūra-*, "strong,"<sup>48</sup> and the type of formation we have here is derived from the period of Indo-European unity,<sup>49</sup> which cannot, however, be affirmed of the term under scrutiny. We have to regard it as a pre-Aryan ethnic or gentilic, which the poet received from tradition, and which he applied to the agriculturists and craftsmen he found around him, for Indian and classical sources refer to a tribe of this name inhabiting the north-western regions of India.<sup>50</sup> In conclusion, Indo-Iranian society was tripartite in nature.

### III

The trifunctional division of Indo-European and Indo-Iranian society has left clear traces in mythology: Indo-European mythology was essentially a tripartite system wherein the gods had their own specific duties to perform for the smooth running of the cosmos. As far as the topic of the present study is concerned, what has been said would mean that the Aryan tribes (or more particularly the Indo-Iranians) had their own religious system built upon a tripartition of gods and their respective functions. The following scheme illustrates the element of tripartition in the religion of Zarathushtra:<sup>51</sup>

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46. Cf. J. Wackernagel- A. Debrunner, *Altindische Grammatik* II/2 (Göttingen, 1954) § 685 (p. 854).

47. It is a modification of Indo-European *-ro-*, occurring in Greek *lipa-ro-s*, "oily, shiny," *itha-ro-s*, "clear," *xu-ro-n*, "razor," etc.

48. *-ra-* findet sich sowohl hinter Verbalwurzeln und wurzelartigen Komplexen als auch hinter Nominalstämmen. Im ersten Fall dient er zur Bildung von Adjektiven und Substantiven" (Wackernagel-Debrunner, *op. cit.*, § 684 [p. 849]).

49. List of inherited words in Wackernagel-Debrunner *op. cit.*, § 685 (pp. 855f.).

50. T. Burrow, *The Sanskrit Language* (London, 1965) p. 67.

51. Adapted from J. Duchesne-Guillemin, *The Hymns of Zarathustra* (Boston, 1963) pp. 10f.



Ahura mazdāh	<i>asha-</i>	sovereignty (celestial)
Mithra	<i>vohu manah-</i>	sovereignty (terrestrial)
Vərəθraghna	<i>xshathra-</i>	war
Nānghaithya/Anāhitā	<i>haurvatāt-/amərətāt-</i>	prosperity/immortality (life)

No comments are needed on this schema as it is sufficiently clear.<sup>52</sup> Dumèzil goes on to argue that the trifunctional pattern occurs in several passages scattered here and there in the Avesta; thus Vid. 7: 44 distinguishes three groups of healers according as they have competence in handling the knife, herbs or the holy word (spell). Again in Yasht 19: 34-38 there is the myth that when Yima (Vedic Yama) began to find delight in words of falsehood, *xvarənah-*,<sup>53</sup> "glory" was seen flying away from him in the shape of a bird which was subsequently seized by Mithra, Thraētaoma and Kərəsāspa.<sup>54</sup> There are many more details of this type which can be interpreted in terms of trifunctionalism, but they are not touched upon because this study will become too unwieldy.

In Indo-Aryan mythology too the tripartite division of gods, etc. is no less clear. Compare the following schema:

Varuṇa	<i>ṛta-</i> (truth)	sovereignty (celestial)
Mitra	<i>manas-</i> (treaty)	sovereignty (terrestrial)
Indra	<i>kṣatra-</i> (power)	war

Asvins/Nāsatyas *sarvatat- amṛta-* prosperity/immortality (life)  
There is no exaggeration in saying that an undeniable form of caste system was in existence even in the world of the Indo-Aryan gods!

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52. Apropos of the Avestan terms please note: *Vərəθraghnan* = *Vṛtrahan* (an epithet of Indra, "slayer of Vṛtra"); *Nānghaithya* = *Nāsatya* (etymology not clear); *vohu manah* = *vasu manas-*, "good mind"; *haurvatāt-* = *sarvatat-*; *amərətāt-* = *amṛtatva-*; *asha-* = *ṛta-*, "truth" (on this translation cf H. Lüders, *Varṇa* [two volumes with continuous pagination edited after the author's death by L. Alsdorf, Göttingen, 1951-60] pp. 420-85: "Das Rta als die Wahrheit der Kultlieder")

53. This is a technical term which has a rich variety of meanings; for a list, cf. W. Lenz, "Was ist eigentlich das Chvarənah im Avesta?" *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 111 (1961) p. 410.

54. The second and third personages are mythical heroes.



Dumézil finds traces of tripartition in the text of the treaty between the Hittite emperor Shuppiluliumash (1375-35) and his contemporary Matiwaza the Mitanni Aryan ruler.<sup>55</sup> The passage that is of interest to us runs as follows: "...at the conclusion of this treaty we have called... the gods of the contracting parties to be present, to listen and to serve as witnesses: the Sun-goddess of Arinna<sup>56</sup>..., the Sun god..., the Storm-god..., the twin gods Mitra and Uruwana,<sup>57</sup> Indra, the Nasatyana gods..."<sup>58</sup> The list of the Aryan gods, despite its brevity, is of paramount importance for an understanding of the ideological background of ancient Aryan religion.

Varuna, as the German Indologist Heinrich Lüders has shown,<sup>59</sup> is a god who has his abode in water which is also the dwelling place of truth. He is furthermore the god of the oath who acts as witness, and it is because of this that the ancient Indo-Aryans swore their oaths by water, invoking at the same

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55. Exhaustive discussions on the 'Mitanni Aryans' in A. Kammenhuber, *Die Arier im Vorderasien* (Indogermanische Bibliothek, 3. Reihe: Untersuchungen, Heidelberg, 1968).

56. Arinna was a Hittite city.

57. That is, Varuna. The form results from a false division of the dvandva form *Mitravarunā*.

58. Translation from *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (2nd ed., Princeton, 1956) pp. 203f. Detail discussion on this text by Dumézil, "Mitra, Varuna, Indra, les Nasatya, comme patrons de trois fonctions cosmiques et sociales," *Studia Linguistica* 1 (1947) pp. 121-29. The text is studied from a quite different point of view by Thieme, "The 'Aryan' Gods of the Mitanni Treaties," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 80 (1960) pp. 301-17.

59. Cf. n. 52 above; the first volume bears the title *Varuna und die Wasser*; cf. too A. A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology* (Grundriss der indo-arischen Philologie und Altertumskunde III/1/A, repr., Delhi, 1974, pp. 22ff. The etymology of the term remains obscure, though it has often been linked with Greek *ouranos*. Another interesting detail is that the god Varuna is never mentioned by the Avesta, and it has been argued that Ahura Mazda, the personal God preached by Zarathushtra, is Varuna in a new guise. Cf. Lüder, *Jeevadharma* 4 (1975) pp. 172<sup>ff</sup>.



time Varuṇa who dwells in it. Mitra (Avestan Mithra) is very closely associated with Varuṇa in the Ṛgveda, which, includes too hymns in honour of the twin gods Mitrāvaruṇā. He is above all the god of mutual agreement and contracts;<sup>60</sup> he is their supervisor, watching over them with his thousand perceptions, thousand eyes, thousand ears, and thousand spies, and as such “the guarantor of orderly international relations, the god of international treaty”.<sup>61</sup> As for Indra he is the warrior whose characteristic trait is *kṣatra-*, and if he is invoked in the treaty it is because he not only leads to victory but also slays *amitra-*, “the foe”. As guardian of *mitra-* or contract, Indra can very well act as witness to treaties. Finally the Nāsatyas, in addition to healing the sick, restoring sight, etc., fight against all foes and preserve peace, and, hence they are accorded a place in the treaty between the Hittite emperor and his vassal.

The correspondence attested by Iranian, Indian and Mitannian sources is too significant to be haphazard or due to accident, so that appeal to the force of system (*Systemzwang*) becomes a necessity. The question may be asked: by what means was this correspondence actualized? The answer in brief is that it was effected through thought and action, i. e., through the vast and variegated system of religious speculations surviving in the sacred books and through sacrifice. Since an interpretation of Indo-European mythology in terms of tripartition cannot be attempted here, we shall confine ourselves to a brief discussion of the nature of Indo-Iranian sacrifice.

There was first of all a bloody type of sacrifice, consisting in the ritual slaughter of the victim, the distribution of its flesh to gods and men, and at times also in the scattering of its

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60. His name is derived from the base *mei-* with the addition of the suffix *-tro* (> Indo-Iranian *-tra*). Homer uses the form *mitrē* (classical *mitra*), which represents a deformation of the original and means “mitre, turban”. On the god, cf. I. Gershevitch, *The Avestan Hymn to Mithra* (University of Cambridge Oriental Publications, No. 4, Cambridge, 1959) pp. 26-44. Thieme, *Mitra and Aryaman* (Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences vol. 41, New Haven, 1957).

61. Gershevitch, *op. cit.*, p. 61.



remnants in the fields with a view to rendering them fecund and fertile. An interesting example of this type of sacrifice is the ritual slaughter of livestock prevalent in ancient Iran and condemned as sheer folly by the great prophet and reformer Zarathushtra. In Yasna 29<sup>62</sup> we hear the ox-soul complaining of the harsh treatment meted out to it by men and requesting Ahura Mazdāh to be its protector and defender, and Zarathushtra, the priest of the Spitama clan and the blessed individual who is cognizant of the divine *sāsna-* (Sanskrit *śāsna-*), is commissioned to do this job. What Yasna 29 implies is that bloody sacrifices and the orgies connected with them had become such a menace that the teacher found it imperative to condemn it. We know that animal sacrifices were popular in ancient India too, and all sorts of details regarding them are found in the Sūtras.<sup>63</sup>

A second variety of sacrifice was that of soma, involving the preparation, oblation, and consumption of this intoxicating liquor. Among Iranians this drink was known as *haoma-*, and large quantities of it used to be drunk by the worshippers at the time of the ritual slaughter of the ox, a usage that was branded as an abuse by Zarathushtra and condemned in unequivocal terms. In India, however, there was no rejection of the soma sacrifice: on the contrary it used to be held in the highest esteem, so much so that numerous hymns came to be composed in its honour. The ninth book of the R̥gveda is a collection of them.

Lastly there was the fire sacrifice whose origins date back to hoary antiquity. The Hittite sources, it may be noted here

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62. This poem has been studied from the point of view of trifunctionalism by Dumézil, 'A propos de la plainte de l'âme de boeuf (Yasna 29,' *Bulletin de l'Académie royale de Belgique*, classe des lettres 51 (1965) pp. 23-51; for a short discussion, cf. Luke, "God's Call and the Concept of the 'Man of God' in Extra-Biblical Religions," *Vocation: God's Call to Man* (The National Vocation Service Centre Research Series No. 1, Poona, 1975) pp. 9-13.

63. For a succinct account, cf. K. S. Macdonald, *The Brahmanas of the Vedas* (Sacred Books of the East Examined and Described, 2nd ed., Madras, 1901) pp. 61-76; even human sacrifice too took place at times (for details *ibid.*, pp. 48-61).



in passing, make mention of the god Aknish,<sup>64</sup> and the Aryans who settled down in Iran used to call their sacred fire *ātar*, a term that has no clear equivalent in any of the historical languages of the Indo-European family. Be that as it may, the cult of fire was part of Indo-Iranian ritual, and the veneration in which fire sacrifice used to be held was so great that even cosmogony was made dependent upon it. We know that according to Indian mythology *puruṣa*-, i. e., primordial man with cosmic dimensions, was offered in sacrifice, and the different members of his body became the different parts of the universe. The Upaniṣads on their part picture the whole universe as a sacrificial fire. All this goes to show how the Aryans realized through action their idea of the tripartite constitution of the world of gods and men.

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Our discussions on the Indo-European traditions regarding social classes have been purely theoretical, and it must be confessed that none of the societies of antiquity ever succeeded in elaborating an ideological and intellectual rationale of their socio-political set-up. The modern reader will invariably ask whether the tripartite constitution of ancient Indo-European society contributed positively to the welfare of the common man. This question certainly does not arise in the case of the first two classes which had no economic worries. Doubtless tripartition: which in the final analysis was a practical way of assigning jobs that needed specialization to members of the community in order to promote common good, worked efficiently when the groups were small and needs were also few. It was a practical way of managing things in small tribal or village settlements, and it disappeared altogether in the West in the course of time, though in India it became fossilized and degenerated into a tool of exploitation.

The inherent weakness of the Indo-European social system – a weakness that was responsible for its disappearance in some areas and for its degeneration in some communities – was its

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64. Survey of texts in H. Otten-M. Mayrhofer, "Der Gott Aknish in den hethitischen Texten und seine indo-arische Herkunft," *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 60 (1965) cols. 5425-52.



lack of moorings in faith in a personal God who has created man free and wants him to reach life's supreme goal by the exercise of his freedom. Such an understanding of economics we come across among the prophets and lawgivers of Israel, an understanding that renders the preaching of the prophets on social justice so meaningful and actual. Mitra, with his thousand eyes, etc. was not the lord and master of history. This is also true of Varuṇa, the most ethical of the gods of the ancient Aryan pantheon, and this explains why they were not able to provide the ground-plan for a healthy social evolution.

Calvary  
Trichur-680004

K. Luke



# Book Review

## **Karl Jarosh, Die Stellung des Elohisten zur kanaanaischen Religion.**

(Orbis biblicus et orientalis 4; Freiburg/ Schweiz: Universitätsverlag-Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974). Pp. 496. Fr. 60.

The book under review is a doctoral dissertation submitted to the Department of Theology of the University of Friburg (Switzerland) in 1973. Its author Father Karl Jarosh did his graduate studies in biblical science and the history of Arab religion in Friburg (1970-73), and is at present assistant professor at the Theologische Hochschule in Linz (Austria) and dozent for biblical science at the Pädagogische Akademie of the Diocese of Linz. The volume is beautifully produced through offset process and includes a number of diagrams and sketches, a detailed biblical index (pp. 407-18), and an exhaustive bibliography (pp. 435-96.)

Dr. Jarosh's work keeps up the traditions of scholarship we are used to associating with the German-speaking countries. A glance at the references to *OLZ*, *RA*, *SAB*, *SBAW*, *ThLZ*, *ZDMG*, etc. will give the reader some idea of the quality of the book. There is a detailed introduction giving the status quaestionis (pp. 15-68), which is followed by the main body divided into ten chapters (pp. 70-398), the last chp. being a synthesis of the conclusions the author has arrived at in the course of his investigation of the problem of the Elohist's attitude towards Canaanite religion (pp. 399-405). Each chp., after the relevant preliminary observations, discusses the texts belonging to the E tradition, texts which in some way or other deal with the different facets of the pre-Israelite religion of Canaan.

Chp. I (pp. 69-98) examines the tradition regarding dreams. As the Ugaritic sources bear out, dreams served as



a medium of revelation, and there was too the special technique of interpreting them. The E writers find that this tradition does not go counter to the faith in Yahweh. At the same time they emphasize the fact that the Lord alone is able to give the true meaning of dreams (cf. esp. the Joseph narratives). The Canaanite religion was cognizant of theophanies. This tradition, as chp. II (pp. 99-122) shows, stands in the rear of the account of the Sinai theophany. The question of Teraphim is studied in chp. III (pp. 123-46). Dr. Jarosh is of the view that they were cult masks. The Massebahs come up for consideration in chp. IV (pp. 148-211): they are evaluated positively by the E source. The question of sacred trees is discussed next (pp. 214-57); the Elohist has demythologized the pagan belief in sacred trees and has given it a new meaning (cf. Ex. 3: 1ff.). The brazen serpent is the subject of chp. VI (pp. 260-81), and the author's conclusion is that the E document has transformed the serpent "zu einem lebensspendenden und heilkräftigen Symbol Jahwes" (p. 280). As regards human sacrifice, E's position is wholly negative. Such is the conclusion of Chp. VII (pp. 284-349). Eissfeldt's theory regarding the meaning of *môlêk* ("offering in fulfilment of vow") is discussed in a special excursus (pp. 298-311). The story of the golden calf (pp. 362-88) represents a polemic "gegen ein kanaanäisiertes Jahweh-Verständnis, aber nicht - in unserem Kontext - gegen den kanaanäischen Baal oder El" (p. 388). With the discussion of the story of Baal Peor in chp. IX (pp. 390-8) the main body of Dr. Jarosh's dissertation comes to a close.

**Die Stellung**, doubtless the outcome of long and arduous labour, is a most remarkable contribution to biblical science. It is only seldom that one comes across dissertations that can stand comparison with the present one. Data furnished by anthropology are cited to illustrate obscure details, and the evidence of archaeology is also surveyed in order to clarify the background of the customs and usages discussed. Biblical texts are minutely analysed and interpreted. After exposing the different views, the author states his own position. Of course, there can be difference of opinion when one comes to the minutiae of exegesis, but this is something inevitable in



any field of scientific research. In this review it has not been possible to dwell at length on the fresh insights Dr. Jarosh offers us. The only thing the reviewer has to say is that the book is a must for all theologians and exegetes, and an attentive reading of it will be most rewarding. It is to be hoped that the author will produce many more monographs and studies of the same calibre as the present one and thus contribute to the understanding of the life-giving word.

**Die Stellung** has a special significance for exegetes and theologians in the mission countries. We know very well that the Church in India is now endeavouring to incorporate into her Judaeo-Christian heritage the traditions and values of the great religions of the subcontinent, and a close acquaintance with the way in which the Israelites assimilated all that was good in the religion of Canaan will help us in our efforts to create the much-needed synthesis.

Calvary, Trichur-680004

K. Luke



# Editorial

This number of *Jeevadhara* was first planned to carry some studies 'On Being Human'. That concern still remains central, but the perspective has changed as can be seen from the present title, *Incarnation Now*. The change has been inspired by a letter of Bishop Patrick D'Souza, Secretary General of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India. The letter, dated October 20, 1975 and given in the name of the Standing Committee of the C. B. C. I., deals with the question of liturgical renewal in India, with the indigenization of our liturgy, with unjustifiable liberties taken by some, and with unauthorized experimentation; and it concludes by forbidding two things in particular, namely the use of "the so-called 'Indian Anaphora'" and "the readings of non-Biblical Scriptures in the liturgy".

The content of this letter has two distinct frames of reference, both of which have encouraged us to re-shape the title and content of this number of *Jeevadhara*. The first is the need for the liturgy to become 'dynamic', 'relevant', 'adapted to suit local cultures', and capable of 'improving the quality of our christian life'. It is explicitly stated that "whatever is related to life grows, and liturgy follows the law of life, which is growth and change". The mighty little that has so far been allowed to grow in the Indian churches (the 12 point programme 'approved by the Holy See in 1969' is operative only in 'some places', and that only in 'some of the points'!) is seen as "an effort to make the Church more incarnate and is intended to help the process of renewal". Here a living, growing liturgy is at least envisaged in terms of the Incarnation, and placed under its sign. The word about 'effort' implicitly admits that the Church is insufficiently incarnate in our country, and therefore insufficiently alive and



growing. No reason for this fact is indicated, but some reason is implied in what follows in the letter.

The phenomenon of little 'incarnate' and little 'alive' churches is directly related to the second frame of reference of Bishop Patrick's letter. And that frame is the idea that the growth of the liturgy need to be 'directed', guided and regulated, not so much from within by the response-ability and faith of the worshipping community with their president, but from outside and far away, by the 'sole authority of the Apostolic See' and by Bishops 'within certain defined limits' 'in virtue of power conceded' by the Holy See's laws. This second approach, therefore, withdraws the question of the liturgy from the perspective of growth and relevance to life: there can be no growth except from within, no development through legal provisions if these are made ultimately decisive. In this approach the liturgy is removed from beneath the sign of the Incarnation and placed under the non-sign of a 'discarnate' conception of the Church. The grounds for doing so are sought in Vatican II's document on the Liturgy, overlooking the fact that this document had for its horizon an ecclesiology (or, understanding of the Church) very different from the one the Council gave us later in *Lumen Gentium*; that, therefore in all likelihood the Liturgy document would have been different if the Council had come to handle it after their experience of *Lumen Gentium* and, more especially, of *Gaudium et Spes*; and that certain points in the liturgy document were dated by the time the Council came to a close, on account of the rapid growth which happened to the Council through its own inner dynamics of debate, search and change. This 'discarnate' approach too has been an incentive for us to focus attention on the Incarnation and its consequences.

The Incarnation of God's Son is not so much a credal banner as a truth for praxis. An authentic Church in India can take shape only through our own responsible living of the Faith, our own searching of the offer of the Gospel, and our own worshipping of God from within free, unalienated Indian Christian hearts. The praxis does not and cannot exclude the sphere of the liturgy. The idea of experimental liturgies is no less abhorrent than the idea of dead, frozen and imposed liturgies. Liturgy is an act of faith and love; each celebration is encounter and



commitment with its own finality and validity, measured only by its openness to the self-offering of Jesus Christ. The thought of experimenting in such matters should be repulsive to every sensitive spirit. The terminology rises from and/or gives rise to thoroughly reified and legalized conceptions of worship.

For the incarnation of the Church in India, we Christians here, have to commit ourselves to Christian praxis and Christian reflection in all seriousness, sincerity and freedom. We are convinced that questions of worship, of the use of indigenous scriptures, of the creation and use of indigenous anaphoras can be settled only through our own experience, study, imagination and searching. Such thing belongs to our life, they touch our flesh, and they touch the roots of our spiritual, psychological, and cultural being, and cannot be settled summarily by decrees. We should be glad that praxis and reflection go together and are continuing in the Indian Churches; that the Churches are learning discernment in the understanding and interpretation of decrees and laws, and are growing out of an age of passive submission into one of active obedience. And we should be watchful to prevent repetition of such tragic errors as condemned the Chinese rites and paralysed Christian creativity in Asia for full three centuries.

This number of the journal is a modest contribution to this on-going process of doing and thinking, experience and reflection, criticism and quest. Our hope is that study and creativity will multiply, and complete and correct one another, and swell to a tide to carry the Church in India to the shores, which we have already sighted with joy, of authentic, incarnational Indian Christian existence.

The first article (S. Rayan), with a few basic ideas on the Church's enfleshed being and belonging here, forms a sort of foil to the contributions that follow. The second study (G. Soares Prabhu) shows that the problem is neither new nor alien to Christian tradition. The new Testament writings are proof that the early Church had to face the problem of letting its universal reality be mediated through particular situations. It faced the problem, respected its demands and accepted the consequences. If in a later age the Church had difficulty in regard to its own incorporation in particular places, it meant that a precious truth



won by the early Church through long debate had been lost as she settled down in the shadow of the Roman Empire. But in Vatican II we have made a bold bid to move out of this shadow into the light of God's Son. The third contribution (K. Kunnum-puram) seeks to describe the Council's attempt to help the Church make this change. These studies provide the ground for a theological reflection on the meaning and nature of 'inculturation', article four (M. Amaladoss). There follows an application of this theology to the question of Indian liturgy and Indian spirituality (P. Puthenangady). The concluding article (M. Kalathil) is a sociologist's reflection on certain aspects of our new awareness of the incarnate nature of Christian living.

Vidyajyoti  
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Samuel Rayan



# Flesh of India's Flesh

The thing has been called by many names. It has been called adaptation, accommodation, assimilation, indigenization, acculturation and, more recently, inculturation. All the names carry a suggestion of external adjustments, or paternalistic concessions. Some even smack of missionary diplomacy, strategy and tactics. There is behind them all a conscious or unconscious assumption that the Christian belief, the Christian way of living and worshipping and the Christian Church are something ready-made, finished, acquired and established; now they need only to adjust themselves to new situations, accommodate themselves to the ethos of new nations or take root in local cultures. The possibility of their being deeply affected, powerfully challenged, changed and enriched by meeting with different religions and cultures is rarely, if ever, envisaged.

Another word used to describe the thing is incarnation. It has been used boldly, hesitantly, on and off. Both the boldness and hesitancy are associated with the use of the term for the mystery of Jesus as hinted at in John 1. 14, *and the Word became flesh and came to dwell among us*; and in Hebrews 2. 17-18, *he had to be made like these brothers of his in every way and has passed through the test of suffering*; 4. 15, *because of his likeness to us, he has been tested in every way*; 5. 7-10, *in the days of his earthly life he offered up prayers and petitions, with loud cries and tears; because of his humble submission his prayer was heard*. Some would reserve the word incarnation for this basic mystery and insist on clarity and distinction of ideas. Others find incarnation the aptest language and symbol for understanding and expressing reality as seen by Christian faith. We take the incarnation, both word and thing, sign and reality, seriously in all its rich and endless resonances.

## Like us in every way

The fact is that there is never a self-gift or self-disclosure of God but in terms incarnational. Nature and man - both being



God's self-revelation' and self-communication - are the term and embodiment of his creative Word of Love. The ultimate incarnation and definitive revelation of this Word of redemptive creation is Jesus. Jesus was not simply God's eternal Word in a particular cultural clothing. He was a deeply historical, densely human reality, a sharer in our bodily existence and earthly conditions, flesh of our flesh, man among men, like us in all things though never sinning, never closing himself to God. His body was of this earth, fruit along with us of its evolutionary process. It was not made of incorruptible star-dust in heavenly places and then imported here. It sprang from the depths of our earth and from the depths of a woman, a dear sister of ours. In coming to dwell among us Jesus was not adapting or accommodating anything to anything. He was not inculturating or indigenizing. He was just being himself in his own country and among his people; he was being himself there as the concrete saving presence and self-giving of God to them. When he spoke Aramaic, or used the familiar phrases of the Bible or of rabbinic catechesis, when he played with children, or considered flowers and birds and seeds and trees and women and leaven and labour for his parables, when for his Eucharist he picked up bread from the dinner table, he was not planning or practising inculturation, but just being himself, being human and honest, present and loyal to the here and now in which God had placed him. The actual situation in which he stood was integral to the concrete reality of his human historical bodily self. Had he thought of ordering some exotic food or drink for the celebration of his Eucharist, say from Rome or from Sydney, instead of taking the bread and wine that were on the table before him and were the common food and drink of his people and actually belonged together with them and their hands and homes and fields, he would have acted in a 'discarnate' manner, and betrayed his humanity, and left his concrete world of men and things unredeemed. He would have been equally disloyal to himself and his mission if he had used Latin or Sanskrit instead of the mother-tongue of his listeners in his thanksgiving for the breaking of bread, or in his sayings, stories and parables. His mission and the whole meaning of his bodily existence were to be present, as total openness to God, within the human here and now in order to enable the human in its concrete actuality to open up to God completely. The resurrection is the completion



of this incarnational involvement, and not a retreat into some distant heaven of reward and bliss, a leaving of us behind to struggle as best we can. By the resurrection, Jesus is released from the confines of local particularity in order to become really present to the whole of history. It is the fullness of his bodily commitment to historical human existence. He still walks with us as we in our sadness leave Jerusalem and continue our quest. He is where we gather together, he is one with naked and hungry people, he is in the bed-ridden and those detained in prisons. Jesus is the companion of our sojourning till the close of history. And the Eucharist is the 'sacrament' of the total involvement and global presence of the Lord Jesus.

### **Like Him, historical and enfleshed**

All this holds good for every Church or community of Jesus. The Church is his, and is his body in the measure of the density of its incarnation in concrete local history. Jesus' original disciples were Jews. Their experience of him was coloured, qualified and shot through with their Jewish religious culture, ethos, hopes, sentiments, world-view, self-image and understanding of God and his ways with men. Theirs was a Jewish-Christian faith. Loyalty to Moses, attachment to the temple and the experience of election mediated through circumcision were all interior to their faith in God and in the man Jesus whom they saw as the fulfilment of their history. They needed time and challenges from outside to realize that their concrete experience was destined to become a mission through a paschal transformation. It took them time to see that their Jewish-Christian experience had to die to its local and racial concreteness in order to rise to a global relevance and then realize itself in numberless historical particularities. The dawn of this awareness and the crisis through which it was reached are reflected in several New Testament passages such as Acts 15 and Galatians 2, the long debate at Jerusalem whether or not the Christian faith could possibly become a bodily reality outside the Jewish socio-cultural and religious context. The outcome of this debate marks a passover from closed Jerusalem-Jewish attitudes to the open attitudes and insights of Hellenist Christians of Antioch. Another pointer to the process is met with in Acts 10, the vision of Peter depicting his struggle and his conversion in connection with the question of opening up Church membership to non-Jews



like the Romans where cultural and religious sensitivity was very different from that of the Jews. Or again, John 4 illustrates the struggle of the Gospel to realize its thrust beyond the boundaries of national, racial and institutional conceptions of religion.

That means that Christian faith and life can become, and need to become, historically embodied and present, whether in terms of Jewish beliefs, practices and traditions like circumcision the Mosaic law and temple worship, or in terms of other styles of thought and life which tally little with the Jewish. The faith falls like a seed into the folds and furrows of every new historical situation – a new culture, a new age, a new society, and new religious conceptions and sensitivities. There it dies and rises to new existence; and the sapling draws sustenance from the *milieu*, builds itself up with the human and the religious that is there, and waxes strong in God's light and air without let or hindrance. The faith will bear its own flower and fruit, but in terms of the light, soil and air with which it builds itself, in terms of the situation and the needs, possibilities and experiences of the people whose faith it is. No living thing grows according to rules written down in a book or orders given from far or near. Life develops from within according to its own inner dynamism. Any pruning found necessary is done not for uniformity's sake but to secure greater fruitfulness, and it is done by the responsible, believing, reflecting community itself. There can be no question, then, of importing or exporting ready-made and canned liturgies, theologies, Church-structures and dogmas. These, in the process of the communication of the Gospel, have to keep dying and rising, sprouting and growing afresh in every locality and every age within the context of concrete needs and challenges.

### **Risk: dying and rising**

The result will be a splendid pluralism: a great variety of Church-structures, spiritualities, theologies, dogmas, all springing from, and giving expression to, the one mystery of God in Christ Jesus. As there are African realizations of the human, African experiences of life, an African world view and an African art and specifically African religious perceptions, so there will also be, and indeed there already exist, an African Christian faith, African theologies and spiritualities as well as official and unofficial for-



mulations of these. An African theology is not, after all, so absurd as Archbishop Benelli, Papal Under-Secretary of State, is reported to have made out in a speech at Abidjan, Ivory Coast, in February, 1976. It is no more absurd than Western theology as distinct from Eastern both of which, strangely enough, the Archbishop refers to and recommends to African Catholics; no more absurd than Franciscan spirituality as distinct from Carmelite, or a socialist understanding of Jesus as distinct from a capitalist understanding of him. True, "in accepting Christ's message, the African must abandon whatever is essentially incompatible with the Christian faith". So must the European and the American as well. The older the churches the heavier does this duty weigh upon them; and one of the things they will do well to abandon is the tendency to forget the truth that the Holy Spirit is free and cannot be organized, and that his gifts of faith, wisdom, prudence, insight etc., are freely distributed and not concentrated in any particular local church whatever.

There is risk here, both in the incarnation of the faith and in its pluralist expressions. But the risk has to be taken. It is not essentially different from the risk God took in the incarnation of the Word into a small semitic tribe, in enclosing his message in human languages, in entrusting his memory to a group of very imperfect men. A faith or Church which does not grow from seed or sapling, which does not pass through the risks and pains of growing up, but is ready-made and imported, is likely to remain static and sterile. That precisely is what has happened to many a Church in Asia and in India for full four centuries and more.

The dying and the rising, the ever new sprouting and flowering in response to God's ever new Word is the call not only to individuals and their task, but to Churches as well. And it is a problem and a need not only for the Churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America but for the Church on all the continents and everywhere. Enfleshing is part of the programme of updating the Church; this programme is born of the honest admission that much in the Churches at the official, organisational, theological, liturgical and pastoral levels fails to relate meaningfully to the developments, values, sorrows and hopes of the modern world, of young people, of the masses of workers and peasants, of the leaders of science and technology and of the architects of



human liberation. Worse still, much of it fails to reflect adequately and present tellingly the views, values and ways of Jesus. The idea of ecclesial incarnation is often tied up with ideas of mission and evangelization. This may legitimately be done only if a mission is understood to include all the continents, all the cities and peoples in them, and all departments of life and activity in today's world. The Church and the faith in Europe and America too have to become incarnate afresh in the new age that has come upon us all, in our new self-understanding, in the new culture of freedom, of free search for truth, of human initiative and creativity, of a planned future, of the recognized presence of women and young people, of socialist thought, of common possession of the earth, of the deflation of racist and caste conceit and of the yearning for interiority and meaning.

### **Kenosis, the Church's style of life**

But is it possible, in practice, for the Church to ignore its own history, to by-pass its centuries-long experience, to lay aside its own growth and go back to its beginnings, becoming a seed again in order to rise and live meaningfully in a new age and a new culture? Is it desirable? Will that not be an impoverishment both of the Church and of the world? Should we not rather bring to the new situation the entire wealth of our theological and spiritual insights, our organisational experience, our artistic and liturgical achievements? These questions are not new. They were voiced by Nicodemus when he asked how it was possible for an old man to be born again. Could he enter his mother's womb and be born a second time? The answer is that in every missionary situation, at every turning point in history, at every crisis and cross-roads of cultures, the church with everything that constitutes it, has to be born *anóthen* (from above, afresh), not by re-entering the womb of the 'past, but in the Holy Spirit who leads us forward into the newness of a future he is shaping with us by bringing about the birth on our earth of God's Word from a woman. In order to belong to the Kingdom now, the Church with its faith, traditions and missions, has to turn around and become a child, coming to birth again from the womb of new cultures, new ages and newly-encountered religious experiences. It has to be ready for this *Kenosis* in order to become a redemptive presence in history. Saul's armour may be fine in 'itself or



for Saul; but it does not necessarily serve David's saving purposes, and therefore it should not be imposed on him. Nor may Saul strip David of his sling and pebbles or prohibit their use. Leave David to listen to God's word in his own heart in his own way and give his own response. The Church's task is to bring to people the Word of God and not also the armour and baggage of past and distant cultures, nor prohibitions and injunctions concerning their own. The word of God judges churches, cultures and religions.

This may have been difficult in the past for lack of a dialectics of evangelization. In a patriarchal, feudal, imperialistic, colonial world, human communication was often a one-way affair; there was no give and take. Authority spoke and people were to submit; the missionary came to teach and not also to learn. He was always the speaker, never the listener. He saw himself as bringing God and Christ, and not also as being brought by them and indeed to them in a new way, even in a challenging and disturbing way. It was taken for granted that the message and the life he was bringing had nothing to gain from a meeting with different religions, cultures and historical situations. But today we have, hopefully, a better understanding of the complexity of the human situation and a fuller theology of the Church, of God's presence in the world, of the relations between creation and redemption and of the universal significance of Christ the Saviour. It is possible now to develop a respectful mutuality and a dialectical relationship between religions, cultures, liturgies and theologies as also between faith and culture, the local Church and the Church universal, and the people and their pastor. The *Kenosis* implied here for the Church and the faith is no more, no less than the way of incarnational presence which alone can redeem.

It is at times asked whether it is realistic to speak of local Churches and local embodiments of the Gospel when a global culture is actually taking shape before our eyes. But a little reflection will show that what is taking shape is world technology and facilities for global communication. These could be common for human groups whose ethos and sensitivity are nevertheless different. The French and the Germans share the same technology, but not the same jokes. The fact is that along



with cosmic technology and, in large measure, necessitated by it, there is developing a search for self-identity in numberless small groups both national and linguistic. The finer and maturer the personality these groups acquire, the clearer and fuller their self-discovery, the greater will their ability be to relate globally, and the better the chances of international integration. It is only the authentic local Church that can be genuinely open to other Churches and be catholic. An incarnate theology will, like a good novel or the parables of Jesus, be more universal than any abstract "theology of the universal church".

It is customary to indicate theology, spirituality and liturgy as three obvious areas for *Kenosis* and incarnation. Occasionally the structures and laws of the Church are added to the list. But any authentic incarnation of these realities is had only in the measure in which our whole style of life and thought is of a piece with the spirit of the place where we belong and of the people with whom we make community. This includes not only taking to the people's language and art but also living within their socio-economic conditions and sharing their lot with all its limitations and insecurities. Conceptions of inculturation and incarnate existence will be sadly lame if the economic aspects of the question are left out of count. For many an Indian Christian, joining a seminary or a religious group means both entering a Westernized or hybrid cultural world and climbing to a higher socio-economic level. Multiple walls and gaps are thus created, fragmenting both ecclesial and national communities, and introducing into the Church the non-redemptive principle of discarnation. Large scale and prolonged dependence on foreign funds, so characteristic of the Catholic churches and movements in India (and perhaps in the rest of Asia, and in Africa too) is often due to habits of planning and understanding mission, ministry and life in terms of what is or has been the thinking in European or American circles and in colonial traditions and consequently a lack or neglect of concrete local response to concrete local needs and possibilities. Economic dependence often carries with it spiritual dependence: we seek to oblige and to please; we lay aside our critical instincts and qualms of conscience; our imagination becomes atrophied, and our thinking a copy of what our kind donors think. So we construct buildings, start institutions, initiate projects and open aid programmes which often ill-fit our social



landscape, mock our cultural and spiritual sensibilities, isolate us from our people and succeed in presenting the faith and the Church as foreign and culturally-nationally alienating as well as partisan to the powers that be. Is it not an essential part of faith's incarnation that the Church should live within the main stream of the country's political and economic life, benefit from its merits and suffer from its defects like and along with the rest of men, plan and work within the limitations of the actual situation; dissociate herself from exploitative structures, and be ready to forgo her rights if that would make for a more telling witness, and seek to offer a service of understanding and prophecy?

### Conclusion

It is clear, perhaps, from what has been said that we are not dealing with a few minor adjustments, or peripheral accommodations, or any sort of 12-point programme, or elements and externals of cultures picked up as an additional fringe and frill to our faith and worship. Our concern is with something far more vital and deeper. It is with the insertion of the faith into the life-stream of peoples, and the expression of faith-life in terms of their concrete historical existence, as well as the insertion of the peoples' life into the faith at levels deeper than any of its particular expressions. We are committed to the incarnation of the Gospel and of Christian discipleship in the Indian human situation. The Christian experience that forms the heart of the Gospel should be assumed into the religious experience of our people, and their religious experience assimilated into our central Christian experience, resulting in a single incarnate faith with its own vibration, color, tonality and sensitivity, its own voice, symbolism and imagery in each place, open at the same time to the vibrations and voices of the embodied faith everywhere, willing to be corrected and completed by other realizations of the Gospel and to contribute to the correction and completion of others, knowing that every historical reality has its poverty and its wealth and that both are there for the service and growth of love.



# The New Testament as a Model of Inculturation

The New Testament surprises us by its variety. A relatively short book as religious texts go, it contains a wide range of theological formulations and literary forms. There are 'gospels', narrative compilations of an altogether unusual kind — neither 'lives' (*bioi*) of Jesus like Plutarch's *Lives* of Greek and Roman statesmen, nor accounts of his heroic 'acts' (*praxeis*) like the *Acts of Alexander the Great*, nor even 'memoirs' (*apomnemoneumata*) about him like Xenophon's *Memorabilia* of Socrates,<sup>1</sup> but proclamations of the 'good news' of man's definitive salvation through Jesus, written in the light of the resurrection as the testimony of believers for believers.<sup>2</sup> There are letters of various kinds, some quite personal (cf. Philemon), most of them pastoral and concerned with the needs of one or other particular community (cf. 1 & 2 Cor), while a few are encyclical letters addressed to the churches (or a group of them) in general (Eph. 1 Pet). There is theologized history too (Acts), and collections of ethical sayings (Jas) or theological treatises (Heb) masquerading as letters. There is even an Apocalypse.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Cf. C. F. Evans, "What kind of a Book is a Gospel". in R. C. Walton (ed), *A Source Book of the Bible for Teachers* (London: SCM Press, 1970) 238.

2. Cf. G. Soares Prabhu, "Are the Gospels Historical?", *Clergy Monthly* 38/3 (1974) 120-24.

3. The Apocalypse of John belongs to a Jewish literary *genre* popular in the intertestamental period (200 B. C. - 100 A.D.), of which the only other canonical representative is the Book of Daniel. The Apocalypses pretend to reveal the secrets of the end-time, and do so in a series of obscure allegorical visions. These describe the destruction of this present world order (together with all the oppressive evil forces, demonic and human, that hold it in thrall), and the establishment of 'a new heavens and a new earth', in which the just, presently oppressed, will be finally vindicated.



This variety of forms becomes even more bewildering when the New Testament is examined in detail. For then some of its 'Books' (notably the synoptic Gospels) are seen to be edited collections of a wide variety of earlier traditions, each with a form of its own, while in all of them we find at least a sprinkling of traditional forms. Fragments of liturgical hymns (Eph 5, 14; 1 Tim 3, 16), early Christian creeds (1 Thess 4, 14), and catechetical summaries of the Christian proclamation (1 Cor 15, 3-11) are scattered all through the letters of Paul. Short stories for sermons (the so-called Pronouncement Stories, like Mk 12, 41-44), theologically weighted stories about Jesus formulated in imitation of Old Testament or rabbinic forms (like the Annunciation story of Lk 1, 26-37 or the Temptation story of Mt 4, 1-11),<sup>4</sup> sayings of Jesus adapted for controversy (cf. the 'controversies' of Mk 12, 13-40) or collected thematically for catechesis (cf. the Sermon on the Mount of Mt 5-7) are some of the many forms put together in the Synoptic Gospels.

Everywhere in the New Testament, then, there is a proliferation of forms — and these forms are strictly functional. For the great multiplicity of New testament forms, and the wide variety of New Testament theologies are not accidental or haphazard. Forms and theologies correspond to the multiple needs of the communities in which its tradition was handed down, and are attuned to the wide variety of cultural backgrounds. Like the forms of biological evolution, those of the developing New Testament tradition are adaptive. They have 'survived' precisely because they were adapted. Stories and sayings about Jesus were

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4. The Annunciation narrative of Lk 1, 26-37 combines two Old Testament forms: a *Birth Oracle* predicting the birth and destiny of a child (cf. the annunciation of Ishmael in Gen 16, 11-12; and of 'Emmanuel' in Is. 7, 14-16) is integrated into a *Call Narrative* describing the calling of a charismatic leader to some special task in Israel (cf. the call of Gideon in Jdg 6, 11-17; and of Jeremiah in Jer 1, 4-10). The Temptation story of Mt 4, 1-11 imitates rabbinic stories about the temptation of Abraham or Moses — cf. H. A. Helly, "The Devil in the Desert", *CBQ* 26 (1964) 190-220.



preserved by the early Church because they answered its vital needs. Ethical principles were formulated to meet concrete problems faced by the young Churches in new cultural situations. Doctrines were expressed in conceptual and linguistic forms intelligible and meaningful to the new peoples the expanding Church encountered. Thus Luke adapts the teachings of Jesus to the sensitivities of his Gentile readers (cf. his "even *sinners* do the same" with Matthew's "even the gentiles do the same"),<sup>5</sup> while Mathew, writing for Jewish Christians makes them conform to the cadences of Jewish literary or liturgical style (compare his "Our Father in the heavens" with the probably more original invocation, "Father", in Luke).<sup>6</sup> So too Hebrews, written possibly for convert priests,<sup>7</sup> explains the significance of Jesus' death in cultic imagery (the perfect sacrifice offered by the one effective priest); while Paul, disputing with the legalistic Judaizers, does so in strictly juridical terms (justification by faith). And the strongly social teaching of the Jewish James is quite different in tone from the more 'spiritual' exhortations of the Hellenist Paul.<sup>8</sup>

Everywhere, then, the New Testament is adaptive. The wide variety of its functional forms and formulations testify to the immense effort put forth by the early Church to make its preaching intelligible to the various communities (Jews, Greek-speaking Jews, Greeks) it addressed. In the unity of its proclamation and the diversity of the forms in which this proclamation is expressed, the New Testament thus stands as a model of the 'accommodation', 'adaptation' or 'inculturation' through which the Christian proclamation must become "all things to all men

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5. Lk 6, 33 = Mt 5, 47

6. Mt 6, 9 = Lk 11, 2

7. This once widely held opinion is in disfavour among scholars today — cf. W. G. Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1965) 279–81. Yet it is difficult to explain the large and unusual use of cultic imagery in the letter unless one admits some such group among its *destinees*.

8. For a further discussion of these differences and their possible origin in different 'parties' in the early Church, cf. W. Schmithals, *Paul and James* (London: SCM Press, 1965).



that (it) might by all means save some" (1 Cor 9, 22). Its inculturation is both linguistic and theological. The very language in which the New Testament is written is, we shall see, a forceful expression of its willingness to adapt itself to the 'ears' of its readers. But this linguistic inculturation reflects a deeper theological inculturation through which the New Testament formulates its message in the authentic thought forms of the Jewish and Hellenistic worlds; and this in turn implies the existential integration of the New Testament communities — that is, their genuine integration into the variegated social-cultural structures of the Mediterranean world.

### Linguistic inculturation

Although Jesus and his first followers almost certainly spoke and taught in Aramaic,<sup>9</sup> the New Testament has come down to us in Greek. Parts of it may indeed be translations of Aramaic originals<sup>10</sup> but most of the New Testament was written in Greek, and it is by and large a thoroughly Greek book. Its Greek of course varies in quality from the highly Semitized idiom of the Apocalypse or the rough ungrammatical language of Mark, to the polished and even literary Greek of 'Hebrews' or of Luke. But even Luke's Greek is not the classical Greek of Plato, nor even the literary Hellenistic Greek of Plutarch or Josephus. For a long time indeed the language of the New Testament was thought to be distinctive similar only to the Greek of the Septuagint (the 'official' Greek translation of the Old Testament)

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9. This is almost universally accepted by scholars today. Attempts to show that Jesus taught in Hebrew, still supposedly spoken by the less educated strata of the Palestinian society of his day (so H. Birkland, *The Language of Jesus* Oslo, 1964) have not carried conviction. For a good survey of the discussion cf. H. Ott, "Um die Muttersprache Jesu. Forschungen seit Gustaf Dalman," *NovT* 9 (1967) 1-25).

10. So e. g. the Gospel of Matthew, traditionally held to have been written in Aramaic, though the tradition is meeting with considerable scepticism today — cf. Kümmel, *op. cit.* (see n. 7 above) 85; possibly too the original of Q, the hypothetical source of the sayings common to Mt and to Lk — cf. *ibid.*, 55.



and with it constituting a distinctive 'biblical Greek' sometimes described as "the language of the Holy Spirit"! <sup>11</sup> The discovery in the first decades of our century of scores of non-literary Greek papyri (personal letters, contracts, bills of sale) whose language is very close to that of the New Testament, has made it clear that while New Testament Greek has indeed its peculiarities owing to its Aramaic substratum and to the Christian vocabulary it had developed to express specifically Christian ideas. It is in fact, basically the popular Greek vernacular of the times, the *koinē* (*dialektos*) or "common language" spoken all over the Hellenistic world. <sup>12</sup>

The language of the New Testament is thus a first expression of its inculturation. One begins to understand just how significant an expression it is when one realizes that a language is not just a formal, easily replaceable code, but the expression of the soul of a people and the verbal articulation of its culture. <sup>13</sup> Exact literal translation from one language to another is rarely possible, for words in any given language acquire culturally conditioned connotations which their equivalents in another language will rarely possess. No Hindi word (certainly not 'ghar') will bring out the resonances that the word 'home' has in English; and one looks in vain for an adequate English equivalent of the Hindi 'bandobast'. This is particularly true of languages which differ as widely from one another as Aramaic and Greek, for these belong to two wholly different groups (the Semitic and the Indo-European) each with its own linguistic structure, and mentality. <sup>14</sup>

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11. So J. Cremer in his introduction to his *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek*, quoted in J. H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek, I* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, <sup>3</sup>1908) 3.

12. On the history and the character of *Koinē*, cf. Moulton, *op. cit.* (see n. 11 above) 1-41.

13. Cf. Ott, "Language and Understanding", in *New Theology* 4, ed. M. E. Marty & D. G. Peerman (New York: Macmillan, 1967) 124-46.

14. Cf. T. Boman *Das hebräische Denken im Vergleich mit dem griechischen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1952) for an extensive comparison of Greek and Hebrew thinking.



Translation from one such language into another obviously poses a serious problem. The problem is sometimes solved by tailoring the receptor language to suit the new message it is meant to convey; that is, by giving its words new 'Christian' meanings. Paul, for instance, uses Greek anthropological terms (*sōma*, *sarx*, *psychē*) but consistently understands them in a Hebrew way. *Psychē* in his letters does not stand for 'soul', in the Greek sense of a spiritual principle distinct from the body and imprisoned in it, but for the whole of man inasmuch as he is a living and a thinking being. *Sarx* is not used in its Greek meaning of 'flesh', the material component of the human organism, but again stands for the whole of man in his creatureliness and his subjection to sin.<sup>15</sup> Such a transformation of language is obviously not without its risks. For the 'christianized' words retain their pre-Christian meaning, and this may react on the Christian message the words have been tailored to convey. As Leslie Dewart has pointed out:

In St. Paul's doctrine of *pneuma* and *sarx* there is question of an inner division within the substance of man: the dichotomy is rather an interpretation of the fact that man finds himself paradoxically existing in contrary conditions at one and the same time, so that he is as it were both strong and weak, both willing and unwilling. But we all know how the doctrine of the "spirit" and the "flesh" gradually became understood dualistically and that for many centuries it has been very difficult for any all but a handful of specialists to read it otherwise.<sup>16</sup>

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15. Cf. J. A. T. Robinson. *The Body* (London: SCM Press, 1952) 11-33. A similar process was at work in the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek — cf. M. Calder, "The Biblical Concept of Sin in Translation", *IndJT* 20/1-2 (1971) 43-56. Here we are shown how the Septuagint loads with new and more serious meaning the Greek words it chooses (in themselves expressions of the characteristic 'light' view of sin held by the Greeks) to translate the more weighty Hebrew concept.

16. L. Dewart, *The Foundations of Belief* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969) 104.



Indeed translation into a new language invariably affects the message translated if only because the new language opens up fresh possibilities of understanding and interpretation which did not exist before. The highly speculative *logos* Christology of the early Church would surely not have developed had the Christian proclamation been confined to an Aramaic-speaking world.

The fact then that the New Testament reproduces an originally Aramaic proclamation in Hellenistic Greek (so that a *Greek text* now becomes the authentic and canonical source of the teachings of the Aramaic-speaking Jesus!) is a measure of the early Church's commitment to inculturation. In order to be genuinely at home in the Hellenistic world the early Church was prepared to run the risk of translation even though it was aware that *traduttore é traditore* (the translator is inevitably a traitor) as the Italians say. It proclaimed the Gospel to the world of its time not in the 'safe' formulae of an original 'sacred' language (Aramaic), but in the dynamic, changeable, powerful and evocative idiom of the "common language"—*koinē* of the people.

### Theological inculturation

The linguistic inculturation of the New Testament is only a preamble to its inculturation in theology. For if theology can be described as the linguistic and conceptual articulation of a faith experience (*fides quaerens intellectum*, faith in search of understanding, as Anselm has described it), different linguistic and cultural milieux will inevitably give different 'theologies'. The theology, or rather the theologies of the New Testament,<sup>17</sup> then, has been determined by the varying cultural situations the early Church encountered in its missionary penetration of the Hellenistic world.

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17. Although the basic proclamation of the New Testament (the *kerygma*) is everywhere the same; the ways in which this proclamation is expressed (theologies) are many. Each particular New Testament author (Matthew, Paul, John) has his own particular perspective and his own formulation of the Christian message — cf. W. G. Kümmel, *The Theology of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1974) 13-17.



Three such situations can be distinguished. The Church originated in the conservative, Aramaic-speaking *milieu* of Palestinian Judaism, so that the very earliest Christianity (*Palestinian Jewish Christianity*), "used the Aramaic language and... for long remained deeply immersed in Jewish society."<sup>18</sup> The Jewish society into which the Church was born was a good deal more complex and differentiated than the traditional Judaism of the monarchy, or the rigid rabbinism of the post-Jamnia reform. It included a wide variety of divergent groups—the elitist Pharisees, the aristocratic and conservative Sadducees, the fiercely nationalist Zealots, the radically sectarian Essenes (probably identical with the sectarians of Qumran), to say nothing of the Baptist sects that presumably existed on the fringes of Judaism.<sup>19</sup> All of them were conscious of Israel's privileged history, were zealous for the Law, and looked forward eagerly to the imminent realization of Yahweh's promise of definitive salvation. But each interpreted these parameters of Judaism in its own way, influenced by the various currents of thought to which the Judaism of the time of Jesus was widely open. Babylonian and Persian influences had been at work during the Exile, leaving conspicuous traces in the apocalyptic literature of the intertestamental period,<sup>20</sup> and Hellenism continued to be a powerful factor after it.<sup>21</sup> Yet Palestinian Judaism remained a well defined entity of its own, culturally and, to an extent, religiously, distinct from the Judaism of the Greek-

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18. J. Daniélou, *The Christian Centuries I* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964) 3.

19. *Ibid.*, 20.

20. D. S. Russel, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (London: SCM Press, 1964) 19.

21. Cf. M. Hengel, "Die Begegnung von Judentum und Hellenismus im Palästina der vorchristlichen Zeit", in *Verborum Veritas* (Festschrift für Gustav Stählin), ed. O. Böcher & Haacker (Wuppertal: Rolf Brockhaus, 1970) 329-48, and more extensively in his two volume study, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, trs. J. Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974). Hengel indeed would press the influence of Hellenism on Palestinian Judaism very far, claiming that the Palestinian Judaism of the first century was in fact Hellenism. This seems to us an exaggeration.



speaking, *diaspora* Jews living outside Palestine. It was in the main-stream of this traditional Aramaic-speaking Judaism that Christianity was born.

But the Church soon included Hellenist, Greek-speaking Jews. Acts 6,1 indeed notes their presence in the first Jerusalem itself, for it speaks of tension between the 'Hebrews' (Aramaic-speaking Jewish Christians) and the 'Hellenists' (probably Greek-speaking Jewish Christians from the diaspora).<sup>22</sup> The tension is resolved by giving the 'Hellenists' an organization of their own under the Seven "deacons" who are to have the same role of leadership among the Greek-speaking Christians as the elders (*presbyteroi*) of the Jerusalem Church have among the Aramaic-speaking ones.<sup>23</sup> For the Seven, though ostensibly appointed to supervise the daily distribution of alms appear, in fact, not as organizers of social work but as powerful preachers of the word. Their preaching with its rejection of the Temple (Acts 7,48-50), though not yet of the Law,<sup>24</sup> goes beyond that of Aramaic-speaking Christians led by the Twelve, who continue to live as in outward conformity with official Judaism (Acts 2, 46); and provokes a persecution by the Jewish leaders from which the Aramaic-speaking 'Hebrews' are apparently exempt (Acts 8, 1).

It is this persecution which according to Acts (8,4) occasioned the evangelization of Judæa, Samaria, and presumably of Syria too. For it is clear from Acts that the centre of *Hellenistic Jewish Christianity* eventually shifted to Antioch in Syria, the brilliant city on the Orontes that used to be the capital of the Seleucid kingdom and was to become the spring-board of Paul's

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22. So E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971) 260-61, with most commentators. Some scholars, though, dispute this identification, Cullmann even suggesting that the Hellenists of Acts 6 are Essenes — cf. Daniélou, *op. cit.* (see n. 18 above) 11-12.

23. Daniélou, *op. cit.* (see n. 18 above) 15: Among the 'Hebrews' these elders performed the functions which the Seven performed among the Hellenists."

24. Cf. L. Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times* (London: A. & C. Black, 1970) 54.



great missionary journeys to the West (Acts 13,1). Indeed the missionary *élan* of the early Church (at least in the West, for *Acts* tells us nothing about the expansion of the Church towards Damascus and Edessa in the East, or towards Alexandria in the South) was sustained largely by the enthusiasm of the Greek-speaking Jewish Christians (Phillip, Barnabbas, Saul) living in close cultural contact with the Hellenistic world. For while their Hellenistic Judaism "preserved its racial and national unity and remained loyal to Jerusalem as the focal point of national and religious life", it was far more open to Greek thought, less contemptuous of the Gentiles, and more universal in its outlook than the intensely nationalistic and exclusive Judaism of the Palestinian heartland.<sup>25</sup>

The success of the Gentile mission led to the formation of a *Hellenistic Christianity* comprising communities made up increasingly of converted Gentiles with no Jewish background but heirs to the complex religious world of Hellenism. Here simple traditional religion (the worship of the classical gods of Greek and Rome) went hand in hand with sophisticated philosophy (largely Neo-Platonism and Stoicism) and with the intensely personal salvation-oriented mystery religions deriving (largely) from the Orient.<sup>26</sup> As Pfeiffer puts it:

In the Greek world after Alexander five types of religion attracted adherents: the city cults in honour of the Olympian gods, the personal striving for sal-

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25. R. Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting* (London: Collins, 1960) 111. But note that I. H. Marshall, in his "Palestinian and Hellenistic Christianity: Some Critical Comments" *NTS* 19/1 (1972-73) 271-87, denies any 'hard and fast distinction' between Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism, and so between Palestinian and Hellenistic Jewish Christianity. But the New Testament itself, notably in Acts 6-13, and in the letters of Paul, suggests striking differences in outlook and attitude between the two groups.

26. On the mystery religions, cf. R. H. Pfeiffer, *History of New Testament Times* (New York: Harper, 1949) 131-33; 147-65. Also, more briefly, Bultmann, *op. cit.* (see n. 25 above) 185-92.



vation in the mystery religions, the beliefs in chance and fate, the teaching of philosophical schools like the Stoa, and the Oriental religions (including Judaism and Christianity).<sup>27</sup>

On the whole traditional religion was on the decline, no longer an effective religious force for transforming individual lives, though still a useful social symbol of national or cultural solidarity. Philosophy, particularly Stoicism with its ideal of the self-possessed wise man, was influential among the educated. But it was the mystery religions, with their ability to communicate an intense personal religious experience and their promise of immortality, that remained the most powerful religious force in the Hellenistic world.

These, then, (Palestinian Judaism–Hellenistic Judaism–Hellenism) were the cultural contexts that the early Church encountered as it spread from Jerusalem to Judaea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1, 8). Each had its impact on the Church's life and teaching. The Church responded vitally to each new situation, finding a life style and a language appropriate to it. So "the original and essential saving gospel displayed itself step by step, and at each stage expressed itself in a new manifestation".<sup>28</sup> New Testament Christology is a particularly clear illustration of this, for as Fuller tells us:

Since Christology is men's response to Jesus of Nazareth, it follows that the church made its response in terms of whatever tools lay to hand.... These tools were derived from the three successive environments in which the early church was operating—Palestinian Judaism, Hellenistic Judaism, and the Graeco-Roman world.<sup>29</sup>

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27. Pfeiffer, *op. cit.* (see n. 26 above) 127–28.

28. K. Kundsins, "Primitive Christianity in the Light of Gospel Research", in R. Bultmann & K. Kundsins, *Form Criticism: Two Essays on New Testament Research* (New York: Harper, 1962) 159.

29. R. H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (London: Collins, 1969) 16.



But the same is true of the lived ecclesiology of the New Testament (compare the collegially-structured Jerusalem Church described in Acts with the charismatic communities of Paul's major epistles, or with the monarchical Churches of the Pastorals); of New Testament eschatology (compare the fervid apocalypticism of Mk 13, with the more dispassionate 'historical' outlook of Luke, or the mystical contemplative vision of John) — indeed of every dimension of the New Testament theology, worship and life.

### Existential inculturation

Ultimately indeed the linguistic and theological inculturation of the New Testament depends on the existential inculturation of the first Christian communities in which the New Testament was formulated. These first Christian communities were truly 'local churches', each thoroughly adapted to the cultural context in which it existed. Sent to all cultures (Mt 28, 18) the New Testament Church belonged exclusively to none — not even to the Jewish matrix in which it originated, as Paul's struggle with the Judaizers and the charter of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15, 23-39) plainly show. The New Testament Church was never a separatist sect demanding from its members a peculiarly "Christian" life-style, distinguished by externals of language, dress or custom. It was everywhere thoroughly at home. Even its worship was adapted.

Early Christian worship had, of course, its specific dimensions.<sup>30</sup> It had its proper place — or rather absence of place, for unlike the Jews and the Greeks the first Christians had no distinctive place of public worship ("we have no shrines nor altars" writes Minucius Felix in his third century apologia *Octavius*),<sup>31</sup>

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30. Cf. O. Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (London: SCM Press, 1953) 7-36.

31. *Octavius* 32.1, quoted in J. A. Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1959) 17. Jungmann notes that by the year 200 A. D. Christian communities in many places owned their own houses of worship, but these did not differ externally from private homes — *ibid.*, 14-16.



much to the scandal of their contemporaries.<sup>32</sup> It had its own time (the Lord's day, expressly set off from the Sabbath of the Jews),<sup>33</sup> its own peculiar rites (notably baptism and the Lord's Supper), its own distinctive 'mood', determined, Cullmann suggests, by its worship of the risen *Kyrios* and its experience of the Spirit.<sup>34</sup> Yet its outward forms owed much to the synagogue service of the Jews, and probably something at least to the cults of the Graeco-Roman world. In his brief reference to the beginnings of the Christian liturgy Theodor Klauser notes:

The fundamental acts of worship of the early Church—the celebration of the Eucharist, the rites of the sacraments, prayer in common, and the liturgical sermon—all go back to the express command of Jesus, or at least are based on his example and commendation. Jesus, however, did not originate these liturgical acts, but took them over from the practice of late Judaism. The primitive church continued this policy; to a limited extent it created of its own accord forms of worship which had not already been laid down by Jesus; but to a much greater extent it fashioned its worship according to the liturgical customs of Judaism. In Gentile congregations, borrowings were made increasingly from the religious practices of the Graeco-Roman world.<sup>35</sup>

So radical indeed was the inculturation of the New Testament Church that the Jewish Christian communities of Palestine

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32. Christians are designated as the execrated 'third race' (*tertium genus*) because they have neither images nor sacrifices (i. e. public cult)! unlike the Greeks (the first race) who have both; and the Jews (the Second race) who have no images but do have sacrifice. — cf. A. Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries I* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1903) 273.

33. Cf. Jungmann, *op. cit.* (see no. 31 above) 19–28.

34. Cullmann, *op. cit.* (see n. 30 above) 34–36.

35. T. Klauser, *A Short History of the Western Liturgy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969) 5.



were long regarded by their Jewish contemporaries as a sect (*hair-esis*) of the Jews (Acts 24, 5. 14; 28, 22);<sup>36</sup> while of the Greek Christians the early second-century *Letter to Diognetus* could say:

Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind by either country, speech, or customs; the fact is, they no where settle in cities of their own; they use no peculiar language; they cultivate no eccentric mode of life. . . . Yet while they dwell in both Greek and non-Greek cities, as each one's lot is cast, and conform to the customs of the country in dress, food, and mode of life in general, the whole tenor of their way of living stamps it as worthy of admiration and admittedly extraordinary. They reside in their respective countries, but only as aliens. They take part in everything as citizens and put up with everything as foreigners. Every foreign land is their home, and every home a foreign land.<sup>37</sup>

Not the externals of diet and dress, then, but the inner quality of his life—its eschatological detachment (“they spend their days on earth but hold citizenship in heaven”)<sup>38</sup> and its profound concern (“the strong affection they have for one another”)<sup>39</sup>—is the true mark of the Christian. For, in the sustained metaphor the letter uses, the Christian is the soul of the world, as hidden and invisible in the externals of his religious practice as the soul itself.

In a word: what the soul is in the body, that the Christians are in the world. The soul is spread through all the members of the body, and the Christians throughout the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body, but is not part and parcel of the body;

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36. Cf. Goppelt, *op. cit.* (see n. 24 above) 26.

37. *Letter to Diognetus* 5, translated by J. A. Kleist in *Ancient Christian Writers* 6 (Westminster: Newman Press, 1948) 138–39.

38. *Ibid.*, 139.

39. *Ibid.*, 134.



so Christians dwell in the world but are not part and parcel of the world. Itself invisible, the soul is kept shut in the visible body; so Christians are known as such in the world, but their religion remains invisible.<sup>40</sup>

So the inculturation of the New Testament Church did not mean its total assimilation into a culture, the loss of its identity or the betrayal of its message and mission. Supremely universal the Church was supremely individual too, holding tenaciously to the faith that gives it its identity and judging all things in the light of its faith. If it was open to effervescent ideas from Judaism and Hellenism, it was always critically so.<sup>41</sup> Confronted with new cultures the New Testament church both accepted and denounced—condemning with no uncertain vigour all that was oppressive, dehumanizing and corrupt in them. So John's Apocalypse is a sustained condemnation of the violent oppression of Roman Rule; and Paul's letters are full of vehement denunciations of the sex and violence of the Hellenistic world. Such prophetic denunciation (so much in the spirit of Jesus) is as much a part of the New Testament Church as its readiness to adapt. Both indeed are integral parts of the finely discerning attitude with which it encounters the cultures of the 'world'. Because it was open to all cultures the New Testament was slave to none, but confronted all as the redemptive judgment of God.

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40. *Ibid.*, 139-40.

41. Cf. J. A Baker in his Postscript to J. Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973) 501: "This openness certainly did not imply the uncritical adoption of current ideas; debate with the world around, whether Jew or Greek was carried out in a dogmatic and pugnacious (and in the case of Tatian even vitriolic) style. But with this went a positive approach which was not merely alert to find points of agreement but also eager to take over whole terminologies and disciplines of thought if they seemed to offer illuminating ways of expressing divine truths."



# Inculturation in Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council never used the term inculturation. Nor did it deal extensively with the problems connected with inculturation. But scattered through its documents are many elements that have a bearing on this topic. These are here gathered together and reflected upon.

By inculturation we mean the process by which the gospel message and the Christian way of life are inserted into the culture of a particular people. That this involves more than the mere transplanting of a Church that has already grown to adulthood elsewhere is quite obvious. But will inculturation lead to a new understanding of the Christian faith? Will it promote new approaches to Christian life? Will it give rise to new forms of Christian worship? Will it bring about radical changes in the structures of the Church? These are some of the questions that we have to keep in mind when we examine the teaching of Vatican II on inculturation.

What is culture? Culture is such a complex reality that one cannot easily define it. But the Council has provided us with a description of culture which is sufficiently comprehensive and is adopted here.

The word 'culture', in a general sense, designates everything by which man refines and develops his manifold gifts of mind and body; seeks through his knowledge and labour to bring this world itself under his control; makes social life more human, both in the family and in the whole of civil society, by improving manners and institutions; finally, expresses, communicates and preserves in his works, in the course of the centuries, his great spiritual experiences and aspirations, so that they may serve for the progress of many, even of all mankind.

Hence it follows that human culture necessarily has a historical and social aspect, and that the word



'culture' often takes on a sociological as well as an ethnological meaning. In this sense, we speak of the plurality of cultures. For, different styles of life and different scales of values result from the diverse ways of using things, of doing one's work and expressing oneself, of practising one's religion and shaping one's conduct, of making laws and establishing juridical institutions, of developing the sciences and arts and cultivating beauty. Thus the customs handed down in each human community constitute its own special patrimony. Thus also a definite historical milieu is formed, into which every man of whatever country or century is inserted and from which he draws the values by which he can promote civilization (GS 53).

### Attitude to culture

That the Second Vatican Council paid serious attention to human culture is clear from the fact that the Pastoral Constitution devoted a whole section to the discussion of this topic (cf. GS 53-62). By and large, the Council shows a positive regard for the various cultures of mankind. "And so the Council considers with great reverence all that is true, good and right in the most diverse institutions which mankind has established for itself and ever continues to establish" (GS 42). For "each branch of the human family possesses in itself and in its worthier traditions some part of the spiritual treasure entrusted by God to humanity, even though many do not know the source of that treasure" (GS 86).

In its different documents Vatican II has acknowledged the presence in these cultures of truth and goodness, grace and holiness.<sup>1</sup> The Church readily admits that she has benefited from the insights of human culture. "Thanks to the experience of past ages, the progress of the sciences, and the treasures hidden in

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1. For a detailed examination of the teaching of Vatican II on this point: cf. K. Kunnumpuram, *Ways of Salvation*; Poona (1971) pp. 66-71.



the various forms of human culture, the nature of man himself is more clearly revealed and new roads to truth are opened. These benefits profit the Church, too" (*GS* 44).

Vatican II is not blind to the negative aspects of human culture. It knows full well that in the cultural achievements of man elements of truth, goodness and beauty are often mixed with sin, error and human depravity (cf. *LG* 16,17; *AG* 9). Hence they stand in need of healing and purification. As the Pastoral Constitution says: "The good tidings of Christ constantly renews the life and culture of fallen man; it combats and eliminates the errors and evils resulting from the ever threatening allurements of sin" (*GS* 58). We may be tempted to regard this as a rather triumphalistic claim, unless we remember that according to the Council the Church of Christ, too, is "always in need of being purified" (*LG* 9).

## Two Texts

There are two texts that seem to bring out clearly the Council's mind on the question of inculturation. Let us now examine them closely.

1. Speaking of the many links that exist between the Church's message of salvation and human culture, the Pastoral Constitution declares:

For God, in His self-revelation to His people and down to His full self-manifestation in His Son, has spoken in a language adopted to the culture of each epoch.

Likewise the Church, living in varied circumstances in the course of the centuries, has made use of the resources of various cultures in order to spread and explain Christ's message in her preaching to all the nations, to examine and understand it more thoroughly, and to express it more aptly in her liturgical celebrations and in the life of the diverse communities of the faithful.

But at the same time, having been sent to all peoples of every age and every region, the Church is not exclusively and indissolubly bound to any



race or nation, nor to any particular way of life, nor to any custom ancient or recent. Always faithful to her own tradition and at the same time conscious of her universal mission, she is able to enter into communion with diverse forms of culture — a communion by which both the Church and the various cultures are enriched (*GS* 58).

According to Christian understanding, God's self-revelation to man is not primarily a communication of timeless truths. It is God's salvific intervention in human history. It is experienced by people who have been shaped by the culture of their time, and expressed in the cultural forms current in their day. This is true also of God's supreme self-manifestation in Jesus Christ. Jesus of Nazareth was not a universal man, beyond the limits of time and space, but a Jew who lived in the Palestine of the first century A. D. Consequently, sacred scripture, which is the privileged expression of God's self-revelation, is time-bound and culturally conditioned.

Nor is the lot of the Church any different. Inserted into human history she has been deeply affected by the diverse cultures of mankind. In fact, she has deliberately made use of the cultural riches of various peoples in order to proclaim the gospel message more effectively, to grasp it more deeply, and to express it more aptly in the life and worship of each Christian community.

Still, the Church is not exclusively and indissolubly bound to any race or nation, to any particular custom or way of life. As the Pastoral Constitution has stated elsewhere, "the Church by virtue of her very mission and nature is not tied down to any particular form of human culture or any political, economic or social system" (*GS* 42). This may be true in theory. But in point of fact, the Church as it exists today appears to be almost inseparably linked with Western culture.<sup>2</sup>

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2. There is some evidence to show that the Council was aware of the fact that the Church is much too Western and hence in need of inculturation in other parts of the world. Commenting on the manner *G. S.* 58 approached the question of culture



What is demanded of the Church is that for the sake of her universal mission she constantly strives to maintain her ability to enter into communion with diverse forms of human culture. The Council does well to point out that such a communion is mutually beneficial.

2. While dealing with the particular Churches the Council Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church has made this significant statement:

The seed which is the Word of God sprouts from the good ground watered by divine dew. From this ground the seed draws nourishing elements which it transforms and assimilates into itself. Finally it bears much fruit. Thus, in imitation of the plan of the Incarnation, the young Churches, rooted in Christ and built up on the foundation of the apostles, take to themselves in a wonderful exchange all the riches of the nations which were given to Christ as an inheritance (cf. Ps. 2: 8). From the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and sciences, these Churches borrow all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, the revelation of the Savior's grace, or the proper arrangement of Christian life.

If this goal is to be achieved, theological investigation must necessarily be stirred up in each major socio-cultural area, as it is called. In this way, under the light of the tradition of the universal Church, a fresh scrutiny will be brought to bear on the deeds and words which God has made known, which have been consigned to sacred Scripture, and which have been unfolded by the Church Fathers and the teaching authority of the Church.

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R. Tucci says: "This was prompted, among other things, by the desire to face the problem of how Christianity can be embodied in non-Western cultures, as is plainly stated in the *Relatio* of Text 4, 1. "Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, Vol. V, edited by H. Vorgrimler, p. 257.



Thus it will be more clearly seen in what ways faith can seek for understanding in the philosophy and wisdom of these peoples. A better view will be gained of how their customs, outlook on life, and social order can be reconciled with the manner of living taught by divine revelation. As a result, avenues will be opened to a more profound adaptation in the whole area of Christian life. Thanks to such a procedure, every appearance of syncretism and of false particularism can be excluded, and Christian life can be accommodated to the genius and the dispositions of each culture.

Particular traditions, together with the individual patrimony of each family of nations, can be illumined by the light of the gospel, and then be taken up into Catholic unity. Finally, the individual young Churches, adorned with their own traditions, will have their own place in the ecclesiastical communion, without prejudice to the primacy of Peter's See, which presides over the entire assembly of charity.

And so, it is to be hoped and is altogether fitting that Episcopal Conferences within the limits of each major socio-cultural territory will be so united among themselves that they will be able to pursue this program of adaptation with one mind and with a common plan (AG 22).

The main thrust of this text is quite clear. The Council is strongly in favour of incarnating the gospel message in the culture of the people who are evangelized. The particular Church that is born as a result of evangelization must be rooted in the cultural soil of the people and draw nourishment from it. As the same Decree has said a little earlier, "The work of planting the Church in a given human community reaches a kind of milestone when the congregation of the faithful, already rooted in social life and considerably adapted to the local culture, enjoys a certain stability and firmness" (AG 19).



The Incarnation of the Son of God is held up as the pattern of all inculturation. In imitation of this each particular Church assumes the cultural riches of the local people in order the better to express the Christian life among them. These riches, it is pointed out, have been given to Christ as an inheritance (cf. Ps. 2: 8). The in-gathering of the cultural wealth of mankind is intimately connected with the catholicity of the Church. For the catholicity of the Church means not only that she is sent to proclaim the message of salvation to all peoples, but also that she should be influenced by the cultural achievements of all nations. This has been well brought out in *Lumen Gentium* 13, to which the present text refers: "By reason of it (Catholicity) the Catholic Church strives energetically and constantly to bring all humanity with all its riches back to Christ its Head in the unity of His Spirit". And it is through the particular Churches that this task is achieved. For they enrich the universal church by the cultural patrimony of their peoples.

Though the Council uses terms like "adaptation" or "accommodation" what it really intends to say seems to be quite different from what people traditionally understood by them. For Vatican II it is not a question of merely borrowing a few elements of the local culture or introducing some superficial alterations into certain areas of Christian life. What the Council demands is a profound change that affects the whole of Christian life so that it becomes more suited to the genius and dispositions of each culture. The only limit to this inculturation is that it should be in conformity with the manner of living taught by divine revelation.

All this, the council realizes, calls for a serious theological inquiry carried out in each major socio-cultural area. In the cultural context of each people we must engage in a fresh reflection on divine revelation. This can lead to a deeper understanding of the Christian faith. It can also pave the way for a thorough insertion of Christian life into the culture of every people.

The main responsibility for this task rests with the territorial conferences of Bishops. The Council hopes that they will chalk out a common plan of action and carry it out in a united effort.



## Areas of Inculturation

Vatican II has indicated the main areas of inculturation:

### 1 Christian life

In the Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, lay people are asked to bear witness to Christ in their life. In them must appear the new man created according to God in justice and true holiness (cf. Eph. 4: 24). "But they must give expression to this newness of life in the social and cultural framework of their own homeland, according to their own national traditions. They must be acquainted with this culture" (AG 21). The same Decree has this exhortation for religious communities in mission lands:

Working to plant the Church, and thoroughly enriched with the treasures of mysticism adorning the Church's religious tradition, religious communities should strive to give expression to these treasures and to hand them on in a manner harmonious with the nature and the genius of each nation. Let them reflect attentively on how Christian religious life may be able to assimilate the ascetic and contemplative traditions whose seeds were sometimes already planted by God in ancient cultures prior to the preaching of the gospel (AG 18).

The Pastoral Constitution gratefully acknowledges the fact that in her community life the Church has been enriched by the developments in human culture (cf. GS 44). In its pilgrimage through history the Church has been deeply affected in its organization and administration by factors stemming from human culture. In future, too, ecclesial communities must let themselves be influenced by the progress of human culture. Thus, inculturation must extend to Christian life in its entirety.

### 2 Liturgy

As the Constitution on the Liturgy expresses it, "Even in the liturgy, the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not involve the faith or the good of the whole community" (SC 37). Hence the Council is quite in favour of



“adapting the liturgy to the needs and dispositions of different peoples” (cf. *SC* 38). It maintains that in certain places and circumstances radical changes in the liturgy will be required. “The competent territorial ecclesiastical authority... must, in this matter, carefully and prudently consider which elements from the traditions and genius of individual peoples might appropriately be admitted into divine worship” (*SC* 40). The Council has made provision for the incorporation into the Church’s ritual of valid elements from the customs and traditions of the different nations. This is especially true of the rites of baptism and matrimony (cf. *SC* 39, 65, 77). The music and the art of various peoples should also play their part in Christian worship (cf. *SC* 119, 123).

All in all, Vatican II believes that the Christian faith, “is to be celebrated in a liturgy that harmonizes with the genius of the people” (*AG* 19).

### 3 Evangelization

The Pastoral Constitution highlights this area of inculturation when it says:

For, from the beginning of her history, she (the Church) has learned to express the message of Christ with the help of the ideas and the terminology of various peoples, and has tried to clarify it with the wisdom of philosophers, too. Her purpose has been to adapt the gospel to the grasp of all as well as to the needs of the learned in so far as such was appropriate. Indeed, this accommodated preaching of the revealed word ought to remain the law of all evangelisation. For thus each nation develops the ability to express Christ’s message in its own way (*GS* 44).

What is said here about evangelization applies to all forms of preaching the gospel.

### 4 Theology

As has already been said, the Council calls for a fresh theological inquiry to be carried out in each major socio-cultural area (cf. *AG* 22). Such an inquiry, it believes, can lead to a deeper understanding of the faith in the light of the philosophy and religious experience of various peoples. Thus inculturation in theology is clearly demanded by Vatican II. It is not, of course, the Council’s desire that Christian revelation be inserted into the



past culture of a people. It is the present culture, a culture that shapes the minds and hearts of people today, that is of interest to the Council. "It is the task of the entire people of God, and particularly of the pastors and theologians, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our time and to form a judgment of them in the light of the word of God: so that the revealed truth may ever better be perceived, more fully understood and proposed in a more adapted way" (*GS* 44).

This seems to indicate the Council's approach to theology. Relevant theology is born out of the dialectics of the world and the word. It calls for a constant effort to interpret Biblical Revelation in the light of our contemporary experience and to understand the events and experience of today in the light of our Christian Faith.

### Conclusion

Whatever may be the inadequacies of the Council's approach to inculturation, one thing is beyond doubt: Vatican II clearly favours the thorough insertion of the gospel message and the Christian way of life into the culture of every people. Sent to a world inhabited by a variety of peoples possessing a diversity of cultures the Church cannot remain 'out of place everywhere, at home nowhere'. She must rather "become part of all these group for the same motive which led Christ to bind Himself, in virtue of His Incarnation, to the definite social and cultural conditions of those human beings among whom He lived" (*AG* 10).

And we will have to reflect on the implications of this for the Church in India. That we need a Church that is truly Indian and genuinely Christian will perhaps be easily granted by all. But the way to this goal is far from clear. Hence the need for courage, imagination, creativity and the spirit of adventure. Since it is certain that a truly Indian Christian Church will not fall into our lap, ready-made, we have no other choice but to set about creating it, with sincere faith and hope. We shall, no doubt, make mistakes, but we shall have the consolation of knowing that we are trying to do what the Lord expects of us.



# Inculturation: Theological Perspectives

At the recent inauguration of a new theological faculty at Abidjan (15th February, 1976), Archbishop Benelli is reported to have said: "The Christian message has a permanent, unchangeable content which is universal. Seen in this way it is clear that there cannot be an 'African theology', just in the same way as it would be absurd to talk about an African faith or an African Christ... .... It is a matter of presenting to Africa eternal truths in a manner conforming to the mentality, culture and character of its peoples, while making it understood that it is a matter of unchangeable truths."<sup>1</sup> This picture of a collection of universal, unchangeable truths that can be suitably dressed up in a variety of cultural costumes which make them more accessible to various peoples is surprising – to use a mild term – at a time when one can discuss pluralism meaningfully, not only in theologies, but even in dogmatic formulations.<sup>2</sup> There is such a facile and imprecise lumping together of terms like 'message', 'theology', 'faith', 'truth', and 'Christ' that they lose their specific significances. This seems to be due to a lack of proper appreciation of the conditions of man's life and self-expression. Without a clarification of these conditions it is impossible to theologize meaningfully on inculturation.

## Experience and expression

Man is as much a product of history and culture as he is of nature. He certainly has a basic psycho-physiological structure that distinguishes him from other types of beings. He has a capacity to know and to love. He is free, but he is born in a

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1. Cf. *The Examiner*, 6th 1976.

2. Cf. J. Dupuis, "Unity of Faith and Dogmatic Pluralism", *The Clergy Monthly* 38 (1974) 378-390; 441-450.



particular place and at a particular time, heir to a specific culture, member of a definite social group. These historical and socio-cultural factors radically condition the exercise of his potentialities. The world he looks at is not the brute world-in-itself. It is already neatly classified and structured for him by a 'world-view'. He can investigate it, think about it, and speak about it only in terms of a structure of signs that is language, whether this be general, or particular to a science. He never meets people-in-themselves. He is born in a society in which interpersonal relations are carefully organized in terms of status and roles by prevailing social structures. The Child grows, not in isolation, but in a network of relations with others and with the world. These relationships are conditioned by linguistic and socio-cultural structures. The Child learns to know himself, others and the world, to relate to them and to express himself, only through the medium of a variety of symbol systems. A certain pre-reflexive, intuitive and immediate experience of oneself is not denied. But man cannot reflect on it, relate it to other experiences and thus understand it except in terms of symbols of various kinds. Sharing of this experience with another is altogether impossible except through various types of language—vocal, gestural, tonal, pictorial etc. Communication is possible only through conventional systems of signs. A highly personal or idiosyncratic use of these systems is possible. Man is free, he can explore and create, but his autonomy and creativity are not absolute. They are radically conditioned and mediated by systems of symbols on which they depend for their self-expression. He can use, and in that very use transcend them. But he cannot operate without them. Think, for example, of any artistic creation.

Symbols and signs are not empty vehicles of experience which can be indifferently expressed and communicated through any of them. Pure mathematics may handle absolutely neutral and conventional symbols. But the more a symbol is linked to human experience the more it becomes 'charged'. The experience can be articulated, perceived and communicated only in and through its symbolic expression. Any attempt to reach it in itself is impossible. All that is possible is to re-express it in terms of other symbols. These re-expressions are variously conditioned: by the original experience which seeks symbols suited to its self-expression, by the adequacy/inadequacy of the medium chosen and by the greater



or lesser degree of skill possessed by the interpreter. A re-expression of an experience in a different medium, therefore, is not simply the translation of an identical content in terms of a new code. It is always a new creation. Every true reception of a communication is an effort to re-create for oneself and thus re-live the experience through the chosen media. No two creations can be the same, though they may be alike, the personality of the creator presenting the minimum and unavoidable variable.

The link between experience and its expression is like the relation between man and his body. The body is part of him and necessarily conditions and mediates his experience of himself, of others and of the world. He can express himself and relate to the world only in and through his body. It is not a sort of dress that he can change at will. He cannot be thought of without it. Correspondingly one cannot reach him except through his body. The only way of communicating an experience to him is to help him to re-create for himself a similar one through all sorts of symbols in different media: gesture, sound, line, colour, words etc. Such communication remains possible precisely because all these symbols that structure and manifest the human world are social and institutionalized, constituting a sort of social body, independent of the individual. While they condition a person's creativity and liberty, they do not stifle them, but are their necessary media of expression.

The body and its symbolic extensions like language, therefore, play an ambiguous role in human life and communication. They make it possible and at the same time limit it. Creativity in art and celebration is man's perpetual effort to break through these limitations. The effort will only be partially successful. If it succeeds fully the medium also disappears together with its limitations, and there will be no communication. A symbol hides as much as it reveals. Hence the constant need to interpret, to get at the experience in and through the symbol, and in that effort to re-create the experience in re-expressing it.

### **The enfleshed Word**

When the Word became flesh he did not escape this conditioning. The body that he took was not a kind of dress that



he could put on and off as he liked. He became really man. He entered into human history. He was born in a particular place and time. He was heir to a language, Aramaic; to a culture, Semitic; and to a religious tradition, the Biblical one. He preached 'the good news' that God loves man and wishes to share his life with him. But he set himself, his message and his teaching in line with the prophetic tradition of the Bible, even if his own picture of himself did not correspond to the current Jewish ideas of the one who was to come. He was even wary of speaking to non-Jews, except for occasional contacts, limiting his mission to the chosen people.

Led by the experience of the resurrection of Jesus and by the Spirit, the early Church became progressively conscious of the universal significance of the person and message of Christ. St. Paul saw him as the source of life and reconciliation for all men (Rom 5, 18; 1 Cor 15, 22); as the Lord of all (1 Cor 15, 27; Phil 2, 9-11); as the principle of universal unity (Eph 1, 10; Col 1, 17); as the first-born of all creation (Col 1, 15) and as the heir of all things (Heb 1, 2). St John contemplated him as the enfleshed Word, who was with God from the beginning, through whom all things were made (Jn 1, 3), and who is the true light that enlightens every man (Jn 1, 9). The plan of God in Christ embraces the whole universe (Eph 1, 3-10) and his 'good news' is to be proclaimed to the whole world (Mt 28, 19; Mk 16, 15).

### **The incarnational way**

Thanks to the vigorous efforts of St. Paul the early Church soon realized that the universal significance of Christ did not imply the universal validity of Jewish cultural and religious traditions and practices (Romans; Galatians; Acts 15). The message of Christ is not primarily a body of truths or a set of religious practices or a moral code. It is a concretization in the person of Christ of God's call to love and to acceptance of the gift of his own divine life. Man responds to this call by an absolute self-surrender in faith, which is a commitment to love and to giving oneself. This encounter takes place not merely in the interiority of the heart but in history, in man's life here and now.



The act of God in the person of Jesus is in a way unique, for in Jesus God himself became man. Yet it is also indicative of a pattern: that of God coming to encounter man in history. This is the pattern of God's actions in the Bible. Starting with creation, God keeps 'intruding' into man's life, revealing his love, manifesting his power, communicating his life, purifying man from sin and freeing him from all sorts of bondage. He sends him prophets who proclaim his word. He gives them kings who lead them to victory. He feeds them when they are hungry and gives them to drink. He shows himself, not as an abstract Absolute, but as the living God, constantly present to them, actively manifesting his love and sharing his life with them. He speaks to them a language that touches them: their bodies, their lives, their communities, their history.

This series of interventions of God in human history documented for us in the Bible is only indicative of a larger pattern that appears in God's relationship to man, God's demand for love and self-giving does not come in terms of abstract principles of morality but in persons who need love, help, consolation, food, clothes etc. (Mt 25, 31-46). Conversely for the man who is in need the 'good Samaritan' is the actual and living presence of the Lord. Thus God's word always comes to man embodied in history and in human life, and man's response is not an intellectual affirmation of an abstract truth but a commitment to action. Man is not merely an individual. He is a social being. This means that both God's word to him and his response to it would take on social and structural dimensions so that not only conversion of heart but change of structures, not only personal involvement but organized movements would be required.

### Unique and universal

It is from this incarnational perspective that we should look at the universal significance of God's word to man in Jesus Christ. God speaks to man at many times and in many places through various ways. But in Jesus Christ his Word itself became flesh. Thus the Word of God in Jesus acquires not only a universal but also a unique and central significance. It becomes normative and every other word acquires its full meaning only in relation to it. It plays a unifying and reconciling role. But we



must visualize this normative and unifying role not in an interior and abstract manner but in terms of the dynamics of history and socio-cultural institutions. In spite of its universal significance the word of God in Jesus remains a particular and historically conditioned manifestation in a restricted socio-cultural medium. In this limited manifestation it exercised its normative and unifying role with reference to the words of God in the Biblical tradition. But it can fulfil a similar role with regard to other socio-cultural-religious traditions only in so far as it becomes present to these traditions in a living and actual manner. This means that it is re-interpreted and becomes re-incarnate in the forms and institutions of these traditions. Otherwise it is bound to remain exterior, irrelevant and alienating. Thus the unique word of God in Jesus can become effectively universal only in so far as it undergoes a constant and living re-interpretation in a continuous tradition in a changing variety of historical, socio-cultural and religious forms.

The same phenomenon can be looked at from another point of view. What we call religion is the concrete way in which men live, experience and express God's word to themselves and their response to it as a community. Theology is their effort to understand the word spoken to them as relevant to their concrete historical existence. This involves an interpretation and explanation which can be done only in terms of their own language. Worship is the response in word and symbolic action to the presence of the word among them and the celebration of its saving power. It takes on contemporary cultural forms of expression unless its natural dynamism is artificially restricted. Spirituality is the way that this response is lived not only in terms of interior attitudes but in projects of personal and communal action and life that seek to transform contemporary socio-economic structures in keeping with the demands of the word. In this way, a living religion implies an incarnation of God's word as well as man's response in contemporary cultural forms. A disincarnate word will remain totally ineffective and alienating. It would also be irrelevant.

So far we have been speaking only in terms of the word of God. An ecclesial dimension must now be added. The Church is the concrete presence and manifestation of the word in



contemporary socio-cultural forms. That is why she is often said to be the continuation of the incarnate Word of God in the world. She is the bearer of the good news of Jesus Christ, not in some disincarnate, a-temporal form, but to the extent that she actualizes it in her life. She is born of the experience of the resurrection of Jesus with a mission to proclaim it to the whole world. Both this experience and this mission have given her certain basic sacramental and ministerial structures. But these have manifested themselves in a variety of socio-cultural forms in her history. The Church is the concrete historical dimension of the Word.

She is not normative in herself as she finds her own norm in the living Word of God. But she has the mission of guarding, interpreting and proclaiming it.

### **Pluralism and totality**

What are the practical implications of the principles that we have so far outlined? The Church is the bearer of the unique and normative word of God in Jesus. This has found a privileged expression in her inspired Scriptures and constitutive institutions. But this is not available to us in a disincarnate, pure and eternally valid form. It has found expression in historically and culturally conditioned forms. It needs constant re-interpretation and expression. This is an essential condition of a living tradition. Otherwise the Word will become mummified.

In a multi-cultural world the Word can stay alive and effective only through the process of inculturation every time it encounters a new culture. This is possible because of the essential relativity of the cultural forms in which the word is enshrined. It is necessary because this is the only way that the word can effectively manifest its universal significance. This means that the Church cannot be a cultural monolith, but a multicultural society. In theological terms this would mean that the universal Church can only be a communion of local Churches, each with its own unique theology, spirituality and forms of worships – that is to say, particular to itself.

In the documents of the Church and in theology we are often given a picture of the Church as a sort of giant organism that grows to universal dimensions by absorbing whatever is true



and good in the cultures and religions it encounters. This seems to be an incorrect picture. The Church is rather like leaven, transforming every culture it encounters from the inside, expressing its deepest nature and life in the forms of that culture. Symbols, languages and other cultural forms are in themselves neutral. They are media of expression and life. The values, attitudes and experiences they embody may be more or less good. It is these that the Word of God touches and transforms, taking them through a death-resurrection process. This transformation gives rise to new cultural forms, which have organically grown out of the old ones under the dynamism of the word. Thus the word becomes present and active in the heart of a new culture. In this way an authentic local Church is born.

The word manifests its universality by a progressive inculturation in different cultures. Hence also the need for the mission to make the word present in every cultural sphere as a living and effective force. This is the true meaning of catholicity.

We are living not only in a multi-cultural world but also in a multi-religious world. We recognize today that the Word and the Spirit of God are active everywhere in the world. This activity is not merely in the hearts of men but finds expression in socio-cultural and religious forms of various kinds. Given the nature of man and God's ways of dealing with him such an incarnational way seems normal. The words of God manifested in this way in other religions do not have the same normative and unique character as the Word of God in Jesus. At the same time there is only one God and what we have are really different manifestations of his Word. If what has been said in the first pages is understood we should not consider these differences mere external and unimportant variations. The basic experience of God calling to love and to share and man surrendering himself in faith is the same. But the way in which this experience is lived and expressed in various cultural and historical forms cannot be the same. Given the basic inadequacy and imperfection of all that is human, these are bound to be but partial revelations of the ineffable mystery of God. No single manifestation, even though it be privileged, can really be adequate to the depths of God. By the same token every such revealing expression is complementary and adds one more element to the totality of our experience of



God. For example, we can justifiably wonder whether the experience of interiority and oneness (*advaita*) so characteristic of Indian religious tradition would really have been possible in the background of Biblical experience. All the same these two experiences of God are not contradictory but complementary and mutually enrich our collective consciousness of the divine mystery. It is also conceivable that the same individual or group is not able to enjoy both types of experiences equally.

As far as a Christian's own faith is concerned, a special guidance of the Spirit might help the community to discern what is authentic and to reject and transcend what is mere limitation. But there is no assurance that its own creative expressions of religious experience will escape historical and socio-cultural conditioning. The judging light of the Spirit bears equally upon its own creative self-expression as upon those of other religions. We cannot handle this plurality of experiences with categories of truth and falsehood. We have to think of partial symbolic meditations, each one of which is valid only in so far as it takes us to the ineffable mystery beyond, which it manifests in a limited way. The believer holds one of these to be normative and central, but not necessarily total or complete.

At this level, inter-religious dialogue for a common quest of the unique and universal Word becomes a necessity. It may be inter-cultural; it may also take place within the dimensions of the same culture. This latter type of dialogue would be even more effective since there is a common background and common media of communication. Strictly speaking, inter-religious dialogue does not demand inculturation. Rather inculturation and the development of a local church makes inter-religious dialogue easier and more fruitful.

## Conclusion

The arguments advanced here may have sounded abstract. In the conclusion an attempt is made to personalize it. God offers his life to me and this life frees and transforms me and becomes a source of creative celebration of life in love and fellowship. But God takes me as I am—an Indian. He speaks to me a



language that I understand. His creative Spirit enables me to accept his life, to live it, and to try to understand and celebrate it in symbolic structures that constitute the very texture of my being and life. This is what inculturation means to me. This process of liberation and re-creation enables me to fulfil my mission better, in dialogue with other religious traditions, as the bearer of the Word in the socio-cultural world that is mine.

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## Inculturation in Spirituality and Worship

At the close of every Council the Church has experienced a renewed feeling of enthusiasm in the fulfilment of her mission. This enthusiasm has had different manifestations according to the type of movement that was operative in the Council itself. In order to understand the actions and reactions of a post-conciliar period it is necessary to discover the undercurrents that gave shape to the documents of the council. In Councils previous to Vatican II, the great preoccupation of the Church was the defence of her own doctrines and institutions. As a result of this the post-conciliar activity was mainly handled by the Church on the institutional level. A very clear example of this is found in the liturgical renewal that followed the Council of Trent. We have a perfectly institutionalized liturgy with all its details minutely determined and prescribed by the official organs of the Church. The case of Vatican II seems to be different. This was a Council of collective consciousness in the Church with regard to her life and



mission. It was an effort on her part to acquire a renewed awareness of herself in order to relate herself better to the world for which she had to be the sacrament of salvation. In this process it was inevitable that there should be various tensions. Since it was a collective consciousness, these manifested themselves in the relationship among the members themselves: tension between theologians and bishops, superiors and subjects etc. Again the awareness of the Church with regard to her relationship to the world leads her to a process of change within herself as is clearly admitted in the Mission Decree of the Council: "...under the light of the tradition of the universal Church, *a fresh scrutiny* will be brought to bear on the deeds and words which God has made known, which have been consigned to sacred Scripture, and which have been unfolded by the Church Fathers and the teaching authority of the Church".<sup>1</sup> This statement of the Second Vatican Council is a call to the Church in India for a new understanding of her mission in this country: a new vision of her own life, theology, worship, spirituality etc. Although the Church has been in India for the last twenty centuries, the encounter with the Indian world was conditioned by many factors that prevented her from realizing a genuine meeting with the culture and traditions of the people. This is to a certain extent reflected in the very term 'Roman' attached to her as her identifying mark. The time has come now for us to recognize the spirit's presence and activity in this country through the centuries.

The process of inculturation which began with Vatican II can acquire many forms. There is one, however, which seems specific to India, and unless we identify it properly the whole process will take a wrong direction with the result that a pseudo-Indian theology, liturgy and spirituality may take shape. For India, the process of inculturation has to begin on an experiential level, for we know that experience is a basic category of religious reality in India. The source of this experience is worship and life. Hence an authentic process of inculturation in India ought to begin with these two. Unfortunately the concept of worship is juridical, structural and intellectual and the concept of life is moralistic and conceptual, according to the existing Roman mentality. It is necessary to go to the very foundations of these reali-

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1. . A. G. 22.



ties if one wants to obtain lasting results. In the last ten years or so the Church in India has made some attempts in this field. There have been dedicated efforts to create a liturgy that is relevant to India and a way of Christian life that can signify a response to the spiritual aspirations of religious India. It is necessary now to reflect on the experience that we have had in order to initiate a new encounter on a deeper level, from which we can hope that an authentic Indian theology will emerge.

The lines along which this new reflection should proceed are the following: Since there is a close affinity between inculturation and incarnation it is necessary to rethink the categories of our traditional incarnational theology. With regard to worship and spirituality this is an especially important task for establishing a basis of Christian life.

## I. Inculturation and Incarnation

Our traditional understanding presents Incarnation as the union of two natures: divine and human, in one Person. Through this formulation the Church succeeded to some extent in safeguarding the humanity and divinity of Christ; but by insisting on this formula for many centuries she has perhaps created a false impression in the minds of people, that the divinity and humanity of Christ are two juxtaposed realities. We have reduced Incarnation to a static ontological reality, instead of seeing it as a dynamic encounter between God and man on a personal level. In the former the stress is on 'union', while in the latter the stress is on 'encounter'. In fact modern theology seems to go along this line in its effort to reformulate the ancient christological statements<sup>2</sup>. The role of the Holy Spirit in Incarnation, too, becomes more evident when we consider it as an encounter<sup>3</sup>. The consequences of such a concept of Incarnation would be the following:

1. The traditional 'assumption of human nature' would

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2. W. Pannenburg, *Jesus and Man* London 1968, pg. 324-328.  
P. Schoonenburg, *The Christ*, London 1973, pg. 50ff.

3. Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, Madras 1975 pg. 165 ff.



be better expressed as the entrance of God into the human community through the Spirit (Love). The genealogies that precede the narration of the birth of Jesus in the Gospels would be clear indications that the Incarnation was a cosmic event and not something that happened merely in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

2. The event of Incarnation was not a temporary arrangement which began with the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, but a process, which is on-going, continuing and ever-growing. By it God as the Logos continually grasps and appropriates each new aspect that emerges from true human development, just as conversely, the growing receptivity of the humanity consciously and voluntarily unites with ever new aspects of the Logos. Jesus of Nazareth would be the concrete historical manifestation of this process.

3. The important event of the Parousia, which is the culmination of the Incarnation will be the event of explicit and visible inclusion of the whole humanity in this process of encounter: "There is only Christ: he is everything and he is in everything" (Col. 3, 11; Eph. 4, 13). This is also the meaning, it would appear, of the return in body to the earth of the risen Christ.

4. Entrance into this human community and meeting this community in its historical reality mean that the Logos, in a certain sense, subjects himself to the changing history of humanity. It is here that Incarnation becomes self-gift of God for the sake of man's salvation.

5. Seen in this perspective Incarnation acquires a genuine cosmic dimension. It is because of this that Teilhard de Chardin speaks of a third nature of Christ: 'the cosmic nature'.

6. In addition to the strictly human and divine attributes Christ possesses, in virtue of the Incarnation, there are universal or cosmic attributes which make Him precisely the personal

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4. W. Pannenburg, *op. cit.* pg. 304.

5. K. Rahner, *On the Theology of Incarnation*, in *Word and Mystery*, ed. by Leo. T. O. Donovan SJ, New York, 1968 pg. 273 ff



centre of all created reality. His Lordship over creation should be understood in terms of his cosmic function as its organic centre.

If we look at Incarnation in this cosmic perspective, which seems to be also the vision of Paul especially in his letter to the Colossians, a relevant proclamation of Christ becomes possible only in the context of a genuine process of inculturation. Hence it is not a mere question of adapting the Christian formulation to make it intelligible to the Indian mentality. It implies a genuine experience of Christ as the organic centre of our Indian culture, and calls for a proclamation through authentic Indian signs and symbols. There are many ways in which this proclamation can take place. There are two expressions of it with which we are immediately concerned, and they are worship and spirituality.

## 2. Inculturation and worship

Although it is not possible to give here a comprehensive theology of worship, it is necessary at least to point out certain essential characteristics of Christian worship before we speak of its inculturation.

a) The Death and Resurrection of Christ is the only act of worship in the New Covenant. In this event the encounter of man with God which led to a lasting union is made visible. That is why this is an act of worship.<sup>7</sup> In the Liturgy of the Church, this is remembered and proclaimed in various human situations where this union has to be realized in a visible manner. Paul says, with regard to the Eucharist, that we proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes (I Cor. II, 26); that is, through the liturgical proclamation we explicitate the presence of Christ as the organic centre of the universe until the whole cosmos

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6. C. F. Mooney, *Teilhard de Chardin and the Mystery of Christ*, Collins London 1966 pg. 146-147.

7. Heb, 10, 5-7 clearly shows how with the death and resurrection of Christ all the other ritual sacrifices came to an end. Christ's worship on the Cross was perfectly acceptable to the Father and it is this worship that will become a source of salvation and communion between God and man for all time to come (Heb. 5, 1-10).



totally manifests the encounter between God and man, between the Creator and his creation in a perfect and evident manner. Hence we may say that a cosmic consecration is taking place in the world today as the death and resurrection of Christ are being celebrated. The priestly action (the action of the risen Lord) extends itself beyond the limits of the worshipping community to the cosmos itself which is gradually becoming the sign of man's encounter with God through the passing centuries.

b) The act of worship is aptly called proclamation because Christian worship is not a ritual but prophetic action. The rituals, both words and actions, which are performed are not merely the symbols of a reality that is present, but of something that is in the process of becoming. It is a process of interpretation. Our static Eucharistic theology with its transubstantiation theory as well as our essentialistic sacramental theology with its matter and form did not sufficiently put in evidence this dynamic character of our worship. Christ, who is the priest of this new worship was not a priest of the temple, but a prophet who interpreted the meaning of man's relationship with God through His prophetic death. It is this that we renew by proclaiming it in our liturgy.

c) This new worship does not take place in a temple or a sacred place. The worship of the Old Testament was centered on the temple of Jerusalem. All the nations were invited to come to Jerusalem to worship the true God (Jer. 3, 17); but after the resurrection, Jerusalem is no more the sacred place of worship; the new worship will take place in the whole world because the death and resurrection will be proclaimed everywhere. The ministers of the new covenant are sent out; they will fulfil their ministry by proclaiming and commemorating the death and resurrection in the midst of the nations.

Thus we see that the act of worship is an act of encounter (death and resurrection); the ritual of worship is proclamation (prophetic ministry); and the place of worship is the human community (universal mission). It is impossible to exercise this worship without a genuine process of inculturation.

The death and resurrection of Christ can be proclaimed meaningfully only if a genuine encounter takes place between



God and man in India through Jesus Christ. The Church, being the sign of Christ has to effect this encounter in a meaningful manner. She will do this only when she takes the reality of Indian man seriously. Man is what we are, what we experience every day, what has been tried out and interpreted a billion times already in the history to which we belong. The Church has to make this man meet God and then there will appear the new man according to the spirit. Thus the resurrection will be a reality in him and there will be a perfect act of worship. The presence of the real man in the process of encounter will imply also the presence of all those signs and symbols by which he expresses his humanity with all its past, present and future dimensions. The meeting in Christ will not be the meeting of an abstract human nature, but of the concrete man. Hence it is not correct to demand, in the process of Indianizing Christian worship, that one limit oneself to those signs and symbols which express Christian faith and doctrine in the strict sense of the term. Everything must be brought into the worship with all its ambiguities in order that the encounter may be genuine. To reject indigenization in India on the plea that it is Hinduization is to misunderstand the real meaning of Christian worship as an event of encounter. Evidently, since an encounter is not a mere juxtaposition of two realities but a process of living inter-action there will undoubtedly be a change in those who encounter each other. The human reality will undergo transformation by being freed from all its ambiguities. Will the divine also undergo a change? Well, the divine as we know it will have to change, for the concept of a God who meets man, who has entered into human history, is different from that of one who is in His absolute transcendence. He will be a God-with-man because He will reveal Himself through the man whom He meets. The Saviour's meeting with Indian culture, and encounter with the man in India will give us a new picture, perhaps, of the very concept of Christ's Paschal Mystery.

In the liturgy we celebrate the encounter between God and man by proclaiming the death and resurrection of Christ in the context of this encounter and by interpreting the meaning of this encounter through signs and symbols. Hence the words used to proclaim, and the signs performed to interpret, must be such that those who celebrate can experience the meaning of the death and



resurrection as something that takes place in their lives and in their life-situations. The risen Lord in whom this encounter takes place initiates the human community into the plan of God and gives a new direction to its life, one that will lead people towards the gradual realization of their deep-felt need for communion with God.

The place of the encounter is where this humanity lives. The ideal place for the celebration of the encounter is where man feels most the need of communion with God, for God is found there more than anywhere else, because He is a God of salvation; He is one who has revealed Himself as God-with-man. The idea of the sacred undergoes a change; the sacred is not where God dwells, but where God acts; God is acting where His Spirit is moving man through his cultural, religious and social aspirations, leading him towards his ultimate destiny. Where this urge of the Spirit is felt most, the liturgy becomes more meaningful.

Inculturation of worship, therefore, is not a mere adaptation of symbols by which we replace the old rites with new, the Roman symbols with the Indian symbols. It is all these provided they are expressions of a humanity that is painfully realising its communion with a God who has come into its midst.

### 3. Inculturation and spirituality

Linking our considerations to the reality of Incarnation as described above, we come to realize that spirituality is nothing but the continuation of that process of meeting in love expressed through symbols of our daily life. It is a life in the spirit, which means a life in the awareness of the God that meets us daily in the various moments of our life through the activities and passivities of which this life is made up. Hence a spiritual man is one who has been able to discover the process of Incarnation that is continually taking place and responds to it with his life. His life, even his biological life, thus becomes spiritual because he is constantly aware that his whole life is tending towards communion with God. This concept of spirituality corresponds very much to the age-long yearning of the Indian soul. The Church which proclaims the new life of the Spirit has to discover this yearning which is deeply embedded in the religious life of our country and reformulate her proclamation as an answer to this yearning. How will she do this?



In the first place, the Church has to have a deep experience of the yearning that is experienced by the religious men of India. For this she has to enter into an authentic spiritual dialogue, possible only through the sharing of experience. Genuine religious dialogue is not possible in India on an intellectual level, because the religious experience in our country is the total experience of man.

Secondly, the Church has to grasp properly the real meaning of fulfilment. It is not the filling of an empty vacuum. The real fulfilment is eschatological and to be eschatological means to acquire a dynamic orientation towards the goal. So, fulfilment is not a mere collection of Christian principles with which we can answer certain problems posed by our Hindu brethren; it is not 'Christian techniques' to achieve spiritual perfection; but it is an act by which the Church enters into the human heart, experiences there the direction which the Spirit wants to give to that life and lives in that context the mystery of Christ with a view to the final goal, namely, of finding everything fulfilled in the Christ of the Parousia<sup>8</sup>.

Thirdly, in this process of journeying towards fulfilment, the Church will be enlightened, for she will discover new dimension of the activity of the Spirit in the hearts of men. She will realize that the Spirit of the risen Lord in whom she believes, can manifest its vitality and power in many other ways which hitherto she had not experienced. The life of the Church will thus become more and more meaningful. In this sense, we can say that a genuine Indian Christian spirituality can serve as a means for the fulfilment of the Church herself.

If we acquire this view of spirituality, the Church in India will manifest her prophetic role in an authentic manner. Just as the prophets of the Old Testament were spiritual men, because they were under the impulse of the Spirit that was speaking to them through the Word of God and through the life situations of the peoples in the midst of whom they were living, the Christian community in India will live its life of fidelity to the Spirit provided it is a community that is open both to the Word of God and to the signs and symbols by which the activity of the Spirit is manifested in the midst of the people of our country.

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8. Robin Boyd, *op. cit.* pg. 287.



## Conclusion

The problem of inculturation is not only a theological one. It is a human problem because it affects the whole person and values that touch the person at the very core of his existence. It is quite natural that there should be reactions when attempts are made to express it both in writing and in action. It may be useful for us to know why such reactions appear so vehement in certain people.

With the second Vatican Council we are entering a new epoch in the history of the Church. It is a period of cultural revolution. The Church which identified herself with the Greco-Roman culture is asked by the Spirit to get out of this ghetto, and face the wide world with its many people. She agreed to do it in principle when she ratified the documents of Vatican II. But she experiences the pain and suffering attached to this act of openness. Although the Roman empire as a political power fell many centuries ago, it has continued to dominate the world as a cultural and spiritual force. We have identified Romanity with catholicity. We have sanctified this spiritual empire and allowed the Holy Roman empire to continue to exist in our religious life. The time of its dissolution has come. This spiritual empire is beginning to collapse under the impact of Vatican II which wants all the cultures of the world to become instruments and signs of Christ's life-giving Mystery. It is natural that persons and institutions which had identified their spirituality, catholicity and religious feeling with the Roman form of the Mystery of Christ feel the effects of this collapse. But there is a new horizon, which is full of bright promises. The riches of the nations will manifest the glory of the risen Lord as He meets them in their genuine humanity, and effect a lasting encounter with them. New expressions of the Mystery of Christ in our worship and spirituality will reveal some of the unfathomable riches this Mystery contains. In the light of these considerations the process of inculturation is a 'must'. It is a sacred duty that we have to fulfil as revealers of the mystery of God to the nations and as servants of the people who are called to belong to the kingdom of God.



# Inculturation— a Sociologist's Reflection

When a sociologist begins his reflections on inculturation he tries to explain it with the help of social factors as far as possible. Who are the actors in a given situation? What are their social backgrounds like caste, class, region, age, sex, education, ideology? At deeper levels of analysis it is the structure of interactional situations that interests the social scientist. What prerogatives accrue to the various actors in the situation which is analysed? What are the expectations of the actors? What formal rules govern the situation? What differences are there between practice and precept? How are the actors controlled? Through what mechanisms is the structure passed on to posterity from one generation to the other? How is one disengaged from a system? All along, the sociologist has tried to compare and contrast one system with other systems in other cultures and societies or even in the same society. It is possible to ask these and many other similar questions on inculturation. In this essay only some aspects of the problem of inculturation of the Church in India will be discussed.

## **Inculturation, spontaneous and planned**

If we survey the various parts of the country it is possible to discern different types of inculturation. One type may be named 'spontaneous' inculturation in which the main actors are the simple, ordinary, lay Christians. Some instances of this type may be mentioned. In the last twenty years there is a definite pattern of change in the names given to babies at Christian initiation. Ashok, Ajay, Pushpa, Shanti and other attractive names are replacing names like Thomman, Anthony, Annie, Rose. This phenomenon, while it is partly due to the influence of Hindi movies and Film Stars on society, is not unrelated to difficulties of people in finding jobs in parts of the country where Christians are at times discriminated against. A South Indian boy who had been complaining to his parents for giving him a strange name



like Nicholas wrote to them on getting a job in Bombay: "I was very unhappy with my name Nicholas till yesterday when I appeared for my interview. The interviewers mistook my name for Nikhilesh and appointed me without difficulty. Had I been named Thomas or John my South Indian origin and my religion would have created difficulties in my selection." Spontaneous change to Indian names has also resulted from a new national consciousness and a new sense of self-identity among Christian communities in India.

Another example of spontaneous inculturation is the changed attitudes of Christians to some art forms. Christians used to stay away from some forms of art like *kathakali* and performances of Hindu Epics on the stage. They had their 'passion plays' depicting the suffering and death of Christ and lives of Christian saints instead. Christians do not have scruples any more about attending *kathakali* and other art forms. They are beginning to enjoy these forms of art like their neighbours. This again is partly due to the impact of the cinema. These art forms appear on the screen, and Christians who are exposed to them for the first time, find that these typically Indian art forms appeal to a part of their selves. They derive aesthetic pleasure from these performances, and do not hesitate to attend live shows when they get opportunities.

Distinct from the spontaneous type of inculturation which emerged as a response mainly of the lay people to social environments there is another type of inculturation which is planned. Instances of this type are the introduction of squatting for the celebration of Mass, use of *aarati* (breaking of coconuts at the laying of foundation stones of building) etc. Planned inculturation was adopted as thought-out policy by some missionaries in South India in the 17th century. Roberto de Nobili was the initiator and inspirer of this tradition, which preferred Indian names, and kept original local social customs of peoples who embraced the Christian faith. Though the promise of this moment was crushed by a decision of Rome, it could not be wholly obliterated. To it is due the fact that some churches in Tamilnadu have been and are the most indigenized in India. A great number of the laity are not bothered about these changes. In a pilot survey conducted on the importance Christians attached to the



problem of inculturation, 90 per cent of the Christians did not include this problem in the first five most important problems of the Church. The better educated Christians with well-paid jobs included the problem of inculturation in some form or other in the first five most important problems of the Church. The most common problem other than inculturation mentioned by Christians of the élite were:

- 1) lack of seats in educational institutions and scholarship facilities for Christian Children.
- 2) lack of ecclesiastical encouragement of lay people to compete for public offices at various levels.
- 3) short and meaningful Sunday divine Services.
- 4) participation in the decision-making process in Church affairs.

The Christian élite felt that they were being left out of the decision-making process in all affairs of the Church including inculturation. While the poorer uneducated Christians had implicit faith in the leadership of the clergy and were content to leave all matters in their hands the well-to-do and educated Christians stated that though they trusted the clergy, they would like some democratization of Church life and desired opportunities of participation in decision-making. This group is split in two. One favours inculturation and losing the separate cultural identity of Christians and the keeping between Christians in various regions only the unity of belief in the Risen Christ. The other group opposes some forms of inculturation and views this process as a symptom of slow assimilation of Christianity by Hinduism which has accommodated many sects within its folds.

Nearly all the changes in the planned category have been initiated by a section of the clergy. This section comprises two types of people. Some are well qualified persons born and brought up in India, in the Indian cultural tradition, languages, literature, poetry and Indian art forms. In this category one may include some few foreigners, who have taken the trouble to master at least one Indian language and know some forms of Indian literature, thought, art and ethos. The other type is composed of Indians and foreigners who speak a foreign language better than any Indian language, read mostly the Time Magazine and News Week and English News Papers, listen to the B. B. C. or Voice of



America, see English movies only, and hardly visit non-English speaking people. Their general cultural orientation is still Western. This type is also quite vocal about the way inculturation should take place, without quite understanding the problems connected with it. They often get stuck in some superficial issues and distracted by peripheral details and give the impression that they believe "it is the cowl that makes a monk". They ignore the main crucial issues involved in inculturation.

### Problems

Both the types are agreed in principle that it is necessary for the Church to become Indian, just as God became man to save men. Both types agree that an attempt must be made to express the Christian experience in the cultural idioms of the localities where the gospel is preached. They are also in agreement that every cultural group should have equal rights and privileges in the world community of believers. The disagreement and lack of consensus are on the questions of what may be central and what may be only peripheral, and on the means and stages of achieving full Indianization. Could Hindu and Muslim Scriptures be read in the Eucharistic service in the Church? Could tea and rice or *cappātti* be used in place of the bread and wine used for the Eucharistic celebration? Should a loose form of organization such as is found in Hinduism, be adopted by the Church in India instead of a tightly centralized system? To what extent should the Church to encourage diversity and pluralism within itself? These are some of the issues which need more study as there is no consensus on them.

Inculturation in a vast developing country like India is bound to run into many social problems. One set is connected with the choice of a cultural system. While Indianizing, is the Church to take up the Brahmin culture as De Nobili did, or adopt a kingly model as Beschi tried to do? De Nobili is said to have worn the sacred thread of the Brahmins with some alterations. He used a quintuple thread instead of the customary triple thread used by the Brahmins. The quintuple thread signified to him the two cardinal mysteries of Christianity, the Three Persons in the Holy Trinity and the two natures, divine and



human, in the person of Christ. He also wore a small cross attached to the sacred thread. De Nobili gave up the polluting leather shoes in favour of clean wooden sandals. He wore *kudummi*, a particular hair style in vogue among the Brahmins of the time. He abstained from fish and meat and alcohol and became a pure vegetarian like the Brahmins of Madura. He performed ablutions just as the Brahmins did. His life style was austere, in consonance with the local ideology of high thinking and plain living. He taught the people who came to him for enlightenment, keeping away from disputes and controversies.

Beschi adopted a different model which may be described as kingly. He went about in an ivory palanquin. A bearer with royal insignia, a silk ceremonial umbrella, preceded his palanquin. He surrounded himself with a retinue of numerous disciples. He gave audiences to visitors reclining on superb couches. Attendants used to fan him with fly whisks or fans made of peacock's feather. Both De Nobili and Beschi were acknowledged authorities on Tamil literature and Hindu sacred learning.

There are also other forms of culture which must be considered. Should the Church favour the culture of Harijans as distinct from that of the Brahmins? What about the élite culture which may be very different from the culture of the middle classes? What is to be done with the claims of tribal cultures as against non-tribal cultures?<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> Is the Church to be partial to Dravidian culture as opposed to Aryan culture? There is also a culture called "Mass culture" meaning that culture which is idealized and idolized by modern mass communication media. This may be roughly opposed to traditional culture. The rights and privileges, expectations, fears and suspicions of various cultural groups must be taken into account, if inculturation has to be smooth and successful. The anti-Hindi agitation in South India, the anti-Brahmin movement in Tamil Nadu, Inter-State disputes for towns like Belgaum, agitation for a separate Telengana State, all of which are of the recent past are traceable to clashes of interests of various cultural groups. The difficulties are greater in metropolitan centres and towns than in areas where one finds a homogeneous cultural group.

One set of problems connected with inculturation is in the



area of adopting the culture to the Christian ideology. Not everything about a culture and its practices is consistent with the liberation of man in Christ and with the ideal of uniting all men in one large family in common brotherhood. Each and every practice in a cultural system must be examined and scrutinized before the Church accepts the practices. Does a practice help to free man from bondage of every kind or does it bind him and constrict him from gaining higher forms of consciousness embracing the total universe?

### Special Case 1, Caste

In the Indian context the caste system is part and parcel of the cultural system, and a discussion on inculturation cannot ignore this aspect of the problem. The fact is that the caste system has been accepted without controversy in the Kerala Church and with some controversy in the Tamil-speaking areas. In a place close to my native village in South India, there is a Church for the ancient Syrian Catholics and a separate Church Building for the Pulaya Christians within a walk of five minutes. Pulaya servants used to be given food in plates reserved for them. Though De Nobili was able to convince the Roman Authorities of the wisdom of accepting the caste system in the Church, and though the system operates *de facto* in a mild form in various parts of the Church in India, we have to ask ourselves whether the system is consistent with the ideology of a community of liberated men. This is all the more relevant since there are attempts at removing social disabilities and constraints by the secular State and other religious and voluntary associations. Certain elements of the caste system are generally seen to be incompatible with the dignity of the human person. If we take Gandhiji's experience with castes as relevant, we may say that discarding or breaking the system is more difficult than transforming it from within. His strategy in regard to the caste system was like St. Paul's in regard to slavery. Gandhiji accepted the caste system but changed its meaning. He vigorously attacked and disowned untouchability. He pleaded for the dignity of manual labour. He fought for adequate wages for manual workers. He wanted gifted children to have opportunities of full development irrespective of their caste affiliations. The Church must



examine caste practices and decide what purifications and transformation they require.

The experiences of the Israeli kibbutz may be of some relevance to the question of castes. The members of the kibbutz own property in common and have done away with many of the criteria of social stratification which we normally find in other societies. Israeli Kibbutz citizens found that self-interest promoting activities widen the social inequalities which they do not want. So, they devised a system in which prestige in the community is accorded only to persons who are active in community-interest promoting activities, as opposed to self-interest promoting activities. There is a real competition among the Kibbutz citizens to render service to others for no reward except social prestige. It is possible to transform the caste system in many ways. One way might be to attach high social prestige and status to persons who do very essential services which are not pleasant to the senses, but promote community interest. Gandhiji tried to do exactly this, by getting top dignitaries to do scavenging and cleaning in the community and getting them to reside in Harijan wards.

### Special case 2, Re-education

Experts in the field of education now speak about the concept of 're-education'. People who had been educated under certain authoritative and centralized systems need to unlearn a lot before learning things which will equip them for life in a democratic set-up. In our discussion of inculturation we have to introduce a similar concept. Our problem in India is not introducing Christianity in a place where it is new and where the problems would be of incarnating and expressing in the local culture, the belief that Jesus who was crucified and buried has been raised by God and made Lord and Saviour of the Universe. The Church in India has been under foreign cultural domination and invasion for centuries. While foreign political patronage helped the Church to expand considerably in the numbers of Christians, it did much to bring the Indian Church under foreign control. Under the foreigners the Church in India was fashioned, to a great extent on the Western model. A Western liturgy, Gregorian or Syrian music, Western art, Western form of administration of the congregation,



Western way of training the clergy, Western architecture for church buildings and Western forms of monastic and religious life and Western prejudices against Oriental cultures were introduced into the Indian Church in the period of foreign domination, without much adaptation or selection.

The result of this cultural domination was the alienation of the Church. Paulo Freire has observed an interesting consequence of prolonged oppression. The oppressed not merely hate their oppressors but in course of time lose their true self-identity almost completely. The oppressed internalize the oppressor's values, so much so that if they ever get a chance to oppress others, they go to it with a vengeance. Under foreign domination the Indian Church internalized many foreign attitudes and values. The task now is to unlearn what was learnt under domination and commence the process of 're-inculturation', almost starting from scratch. If Paulo Freire's theory is correct, one can expect a good bit of resistance to suggestions on inculturation from many Indian Bishops. We could further expect more opposition to it from those bishops whose areas suffered most under foreign rule.

At the present stage of alienation the Indian Church looks to the West for inspiration. It relies on foreign personnel partly and a great deal on foreign funds. It is often found without ideas of its own on the problems of 'the third world'. While the candidates for priesthood are elaborately and minutely instructed in the English language and literature, Western philosophy, Western Theology and Western Church history, sufficient emphasis is not placed on Indian Church history, Indian Theology, Indian Philosophy, Indian languages and forms of Indian art. From the description of Douglas Hyde and some other writers, it would seem that the training given now in Indian Seminaries closely resembles the training given in their Western Counterparts some fifty years ago. This may explain in part the condition of the 301 drop-outs from Seminaries in Kerala studied by Fr. George Koilparambil. He found that the drop-outs were handicapped in many ways. He also found that the greater the number of years the drop-outs were in Seminaries, the more handicapped they were. Had the seminarians been trained to be leaders in their own communities and made proficient in the use of the cultural



idiom of the people, they would not have been in such a condition on leaving the seminaries.

### Communities and Communication

One aspect of the problem of inculturation is the response it evokes from the other communities around. In some parts of the country, social anthropologists found a phenomenon of a cultural group resisting with violence the attempt of another group to Sanskritize their life styles and move up in the social hierarchy. Several cases of Harijan communities trying to put on the sacred thread or draw water from certain wells or build decent houses, or refusing to perform some traditional services for their social superiors have been recorded. These were followed by physical chastisement of the Harijans by the upper castes. The incidents were not of the distant past. The Harijans' natural and constitutional rights to life and liberty could not be enforced as they lacked economic power and social influence. If in the process of inculturation, Christians take up certain cultural idioms, we need not expect a violent response to it from the educated Hindu and Muslim neighbours. Educated Christians have made a fairly good impression on the literate public. Instances of Christians and Muslims celebrating Deevali in North India by illuminating their houses and Christians taking part in the Onam and Pongal festival celebrations in South India have been particularly pleasing to the Hindu communities in the respective areas. However, in remote villages in North India where a good number of Christians belong to Scheduled Castes, there could be violent resistance from members of the upper castes on specific issues. These may be confined to areas where Harijan Christians may begin to demand equality with the higher caste. It must be noted immediately that such persecution may not be on the basis of religion. The violent reaction would be there even if the Harijans were Hindus.

Given the emphasis of the Church on education and equality one might have expected the Harijan Christians to come into violent clashes with the members of the upper castes, sooner than other Harijans. This has not been the case. Some missionaries have ventured to suggest an explanation for this. Though hopes of material gain and improvement of social position have been



considerations in many of the Harijan conversions, the Harijan Christians have not actually moved up in the social hierarchy as a group. In fact the Christian Harijans have been looked down upon by fellow Harijans. They appear to have lost some of their self-respect somewhere in the process of becoming Christians. A part of the explanation for this could be the extreme material deprivation in the Harijan Community which induces some to seek a change of religion in the hope of benefiting materially. This act is considered degrading in their own eyes as well as of their fellows.

The phenomenon of inculturation indicates a desire to remove or do away with some types of segregation from others in a locality and establish close communications with neighbours. In this aspect it is similar to some other phenomena in the Church. In religious Orders and Congregations distinctions used to be made between members with solemn vows and simple vows, between priests and lay brothers, between novices and formed members, between seniors and juniors. Separate dining tables, for various categories in the same religious communities, separate style of dress, restrictions regarding communications among the members of the group on the basis of rank distinctions, and differential rights and privileges for various grades were quite marked twenty years ago. Many of these segregations and taboos are vanishing and there seems to be a realization that for establishing fellowship between persons, the less of segregations and artificial distinctions and stratifications the better.

Communication between two persons, is qualitatively improved when one tries to use the cultural system of the other. A few sentences in the other's language learnt by heart may break the ice between them. The few sentences help to break down the barriers between them at least symbolically and create a proper emotional climate for mutually beneficial exchange of experiences. Other things being equal, people tend to feel more secure and more at ease in the company of others who speak the same language, enjoy the same jokes, and dress in the same way as they do. One of the aims of inculturation in the Church is to do away with unnecessary cultural barriers to communication.



M. N. Srinivas in his study of Sanskritization observed a fairly widespread phenomenon in India. Groups which occupy a low position in the social hierarchy tend to look up at the classes above them and model their life styles on the Brahminic and other models higher up in the social hierarchy. While this process goes on, the top strata of society do not remain static. They are also on the move. Many of them have taken to Western life styles, giving up vegetarianism and teetotalism and other observances connected with ideas of purity and pollution. By the time the lower groups catch up with Brahminic practices, the Brahmins themselves have discarded several of those practices and adopted new ways. In the matter of inculturation of the Church in India too, Christians can be for ever trying to catch up with, and trailing behind the leading groups in India. The alternative for the Christians is not to try to play the role of torch-bearer lighting the path for others, but to associate themselves with others who are sincerely looking for cultural systems which are able to express new levels of consciousness and are rooted in our cultural heritage.

### **Conclusion: Mercy and Justice**

In an attempt to understand the views of non-Christians on inculturation, a small random sample of non-Christians was taken and asked to list the five most important things the Church should be interested in. Few respondents named inculturation in their lists. Most respondents listed only five works of mercy. While all were appreciative of the institutional success of the Church in the field of education and health care, and wanted other communities to emulate the Church in these respects, some wanted her to be geared to the needs of the masses. Some suggested new approaches to works of mercy. When asked specifically if the problem of inculturation and the works of mercy which they listed could be linked, the response was in the affirmative. Involvement in effective works of mercy and catering to the crucial needs of India would show Christians the real culture of the great mass of the Indian people. It was also thought that success in works of mercy was dependent in part on the ability to communicate with people in their cultural idiom.

Inculturation of Christian ideology may be compared with



the inculturation of another ideology which also stakes its claims to universality. The Communist ideology not only claims applicability to all nations but it is already a formidable force in various parts of the world. Like Christianity, Communism also holds, in theory, that it needs to be expressed in diverse cultures and that all the cultural groups should have equal rights and privileges. But in practice, it runs into many difficulties. One or another group tries to dominate others and to decide from far away, even the minutest details of policies in a new area. In fact the tendency to interfere and the opposite tendency to resist domination may explain the bi-partite division of the Communist bloc, much against the interest of promoting the ideology of both sections. Christians also should bear in mind that such interference in local affairs is possible also within the Church. It must be understood that the common interest is best served by granting equality to all cultural groups in the Church and to each group a certain autonomy in its internal affairs.

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# Editorial

This issue of *Jeevadhara* deals with the Nature of *Authority in the Church in the Indian context*. It has been a topic of great interest in the ecclesiological studies of recent years. The reason is quite obvious in the post-conciliar context.

The Council was convoked for renewal and reunion. The renewal of the Church is intimately linked with the problem of ecclesial leadership. Leadership is of capital importance in a society or in any collective undertaking. Success and failures largely depend on the integrity and dynamism of the leadership. As a society the Church is not an exception to this principle.

We live in an atmosphere where the need of indigenization or acculturation is almost universally felt. The problem of authority should also be understood and appreciated in this perspective. Hence the studies in this issue are directed to this end. The first two articles are Biblical and theological reflections while the next three open up the Indian horizon of this problem.

The Indian mind is profoundly spiritual and not in tune with the juridical vision of any religion. The authority of religion for it, is based on Spirit and Truth. The impact and influence of religion in India depends on its dynamic spiritual force. It is a moral force which is exerted not through domination but by authentic examples. It is not a mere intellectual sharing but something more than that. Religious leadership in the Indian context is closely linked with the idea of the Guru. The authority of a Guru depends on the credibility of his life. His leadership is not derived from legal titles, privileges or prerogatives but from the integrity of his life which loudly proclaims the authenticity of his spiritual leadership. The pastoral advice in the first epistle of St. Peter is quite in tune with this idea: 'I exhort the elders among you...Tend the flock of God that is in your charge, not by constraint...not for shameful gain...not as



domineering over those in your charge but by being examples to the flock" (I Pet. 5, 1-3). The spirit of renunciation, poverty, simplicity, detachment and kindness are genuine signs of a Guru. The All-India Seminar held at Bangalore in 1969 made the following appeal: "We earnestly appeal to all Bishops...in India that in conformity with the mind of Christ and the religious tradition of the country they become shining examples of humility, poverty and simplicity in their personal and community lives, divesting themselves of material possessions and symbols of honour in apparel and forms of address less in keeping with a true image of a man of God" (All India Seminar 'Church in India Today' Bangalore, 1969 (CBCI Centre) pp. 254-255).

In this issue the first article deals with the concept of authority in the Church in general. It analyses the terminology and explains its theological content in the light of the structural evolution of the Church. The second article, by Joseph Pathrapankal, is on the Pauline understanding of authority in the Church. The article that follows, by D. Bhatt, calls attention to the Indian context of the Guru-Sishya relations. It is followed by John B. Chethimattam's study of the concept of authority in the Hindu Scriptures. Thomas Mampira makes a survey of the modern reformers of Hinduism who exert great influence on the Religious traditions in India.

The modest attempt of this issue is to understand and appreciate the nature and role of authority in the Church in the Indian context. The Church of Christ becomes true to its name in proportion to its identification with the life of Christ who came to serve and not to be served. Authority in the Church is called upon to give guidance and inspiration while faithfully following in the path of the Lord.

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# Nature of Authority in the Church

Why have the structures of ecclesiastical authority become an object of much criticism? Is it a symptom of weakness or of creative thinking? Does the present tendency to evaluate some of the traditional structures of ecclesiastical authority create a kind of insecurity and confusion?

The Second Vatican Council stands out in the history of Ecumenical Councils, with its own particular end in view, the renewal of the Church. If the earlier Councils were preoccupied with the question of strictly formulating the doctrines of the Church and condemning those who were not prepared to abide by them, Vatican II is primarily intended for renewal and restoration of Christian unity. We have to renew what is tarnished by time and restore what is lost. It is an unquestionable sociological truth that the successes and failures of any collective undertaking largely depend on its leadership. The leadership is always the dynamic source of inspiration and strength for the whole society. Hence it is quite natural that in this period of renewal much of the ecclesiological thinking is centred on the nature and structure of the leadership in the Church.

Ecclesiologists and historians observe that during the course of centuries the idea of Christian authority has undergone many unhealthy influences.<sup>1</sup> The various canonical collections are not

1. Some of the recent literature on this subject: John M. Todd, (ed) *Problems of Authority*, London, 1964; John Dalrymple and others, *Authority in a Changing Church*, London, 1968; John L. McKenzie, *Authority in the Church*, London 1966. The following book indirectly deals with the problems of authority in the light of obedience: Karl Rahner and others, *Obedience and the Church*, London, 1968; Robert Markus and E. John, *Papacy and Hierarchy*, London, 1969; Edmund Hill, art. 'Authority in the Church', in the *Clergy Review* (1965), pp 619-628 and 'Development of Institutions', *ibid* pp. 674-685. Yves Congar, *Power and*



exception to this strange development. The consequences are far-reaching. The problem at present does not seem to be a question of denial of authority but the quest to explicate the genuine concept of authority which Jesus Christ wanted to be exercised in His Church.

The first part of this study is an etymological analysis of the word 'authority' in its Biblical context. It is followed by a brief historical survey of the structural evolution of the ecclesiastical authority. In the light of this survey a few theological reflections are made on the nature of authority in the Church.

## I. Authority in the New Testament

The normal Greek word for authority in the New Testament is *exousia*<sup>2</sup>. It means lawful authority, or the situation in which one is able, competent or permitted to perform an action. The word 'competence' seems to be the best English equivalent. It means the state of freedom of a person to act what is right and communicate it to others.<sup>3</sup> It is not mere *power* over others but the rightful freedom to do what is genuinely right.

The Latin word for *exousia* is *potestas*. It is used 102 times in the New Testament<sup>4</sup>. It means 'lawful authority'. Though the word *auctoritas* (authority) is sometimes used in the ecclesiastical documents, *potestas* is the proper word used in the N. Testa-

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*Poverty in the Church*, London, 1964; Hans Küng historically and critically analyses the nature, meaning and function of authority in the Church in the following works: *The Structures of the Church*, London, 1965; *The Church*, London, 1967; Peter Hebblethwaite, 'Towards a Church of Service' in *The Way* Oct. 1966, pp. 275-283.

2. See the detailed etymological analysis of the Greek word *exousis* by Foerster in *Theological Dictionary of N. Testament*, G. Kittel (ed) transl. by G. W. Bromiley, Vol. II, Michigan, 1968 pp. 560-575.

3. Cfr. Robert Murray and others, article on 'Authority and Spirit in the New Testament' in the book *Authority in a Changing Church*, London, 1968, pp. 32-33.

4. Edmund Hill, *Authority in the Church*, in *Clergy Review*, London, 1966, pp. 619-628.



ment: to denote *exousia*. *Potestas* is distinct from *potentia* which means sheer power. In the New Testament *exousia* does not have the connotation of dominion over others<sup>5</sup>.

The *exousia* which is given by Christ to his Church is Trinitarian in its origin. Its source is God the Father. "As the Father has sent me even so I send you"<sup>6</sup>. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..."<sup>7</sup>. This *exousia* is for sharing the divine life which was communicated to Christ in its fulness before the beginning of time.

During His public ministry Jesus made use of His *exousia* on different occasions: "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"<sup>8</sup>. He manifests it in His teaching: "He taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes"<sup>9</sup>. The Son shares the life of the Father and has His authority from the Father. "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgement, because He is the Son of man"<sup>10</sup>. The laying down of his life for others is in tune with his *exousia*: "No one takes it (life) from me, but I lay it down on my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father"<sup>11</sup>. All forms of authority are derived forms from the *ousia* of the Father. The whole authority of the Church and the world is dependent on Christ Jesus who has it in its fulness.

The giving of the Holy Spirit to the disciples was also the sharing of the divine *exousia*<sup>12</sup>. This Spirit which is the Spirit of Christ continues to be the life-giving principle of the Church. It was given to the whole Church, according to the distribution

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5. 2 Cor. 3, 17; cfr also Gal. 5, 1, 13-14, 18, 22, 25.

6. Jn 20, 21

7. Mt. 28, 18-19; Lk 12, 5.

8. Mt 9, 6

9. Mt 7, 29

10. Jn 5, 26-27; Rom 13, 1.

11. Jn 10, 18.

12. Jn 20, 22; Acts 8, 19



of the Spirit<sup>13</sup>. This Spirit has made the disciples the children of God. As the true sharers of Christ's *exousia* every disciple is made an adopted son in Christ.

The life of the Church, which is Trinitarian in its origin, is a Spirit-filled reality. The Spirit of the Risen Lord is ever-operative in his Body, the Church. Openness and freedom are distinctive characters of the Spirit. Hence Paul says "Where the Spirit is, there is freedom"<sup>14</sup>. This Spirit cannot be stifled<sup>15</sup>. The eternal Spirit of God with its all-embracing inner effusiveness unites men and leads them to the fulness of life and freedom. The Church as a Spirit-directed reality is there to help men grow into the communion of *exousia* of the Spirit of God.

## II. Ecclesial Society: its structural evolution

The author of the Acts of the Apostles shows us how the Kingdom first preached to the Jews, had become the good news also to others. There was the first community under the leadership of the Apostles. They felt the need of devoting themselves fully to the preaching of the Gospel. Hence, at their request, the believers elected seven men of good repute whom the Apostles approved and accepted for the ministry "with the laying of their hands on them"<sup>16</sup>. The pneumatic aspect was very evident in the ecclesial life. The early Christians were immensely joyful and wanted to share their faith with others.

In their turn the Apostles went to different countries and founded local Churches. Their experience of the Christ-event was the heritage of these Churches which they founded. These were concrete manifestations of the Christian faith expressed by the Apostles in particular socio-cultural contexts. The universal Church consisted of the communion of these individual Churches.

In the beginning the Apostles were the highest authority in the Church. There were also the Elders (*presbyteroi*) and Overseers (*episkopoi*). In Jewish society the Council of Elders exercised office collectively. The Elders and Overseers were ordained to their ministry by the rite of laying of hands on

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13. I Cor. 12, 4 f.

15. I Thess. 5, 19.

14. 2 Cor. 3, 17

16. Acts 6, 1-6



them<sup>17</sup>. They were the stewards of the mysteries of Christ. This structure gradually assumed new forms when the Church became the official religion of the Roman Empire.

**a) The Church the official religion of the Roman Empire**

In the fourth century the Church became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Yves Congar in his historical survey of this evolution makes the following observation<sup>18</sup>

“The clergy were given important privileges, the bishops became *illustri*, and for all practical purposes ranked with the senators. They were invested with public authority within the framework of the Empire, even in the sphere of secular life of the cities... The bishops frequently called on the imperial authority for support... Under these circumstances, we ought perhaps to expect that authority would change its character and that it would acquire a more secular, much more juridical meaning, based on the relation of superior to subordinate”<sup>19</sup>.

The introduction of special uniform for the clergy was another development in this line of separation from the laity<sup>20</sup>.

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17. Acts 14, 23.

18. Yves Congar, ‘The Historical Development of Authority’, in *The Problems of Authority* ed. by John M. Todd, op. cit. p. 128.

19. Yves Congar, *ibid.* p. 135, cautiously points out the contrast between the Church of the martyrs and the Church of the Empire: “Thus whilst in the Church of the Martyrs there was a tension not inside the Church, between the various categories of Christians, but between the ecclesia and the world, thenceforth within a society entirely Christian, tension grew inside the Church or within Christian society between monks or priests on the one hand and laymen on the other”.

20. The introduction of special clerical uniform initiated a considerable change in the relation of the clergy with the laity. Yves Congar, *ibid.* p. 135, foot-note No. 4: In 428, Pope Celestine (422-432) “upbraided Honoratus, abbot of Lerins, who had been appointed Bishop of Arles, for introducing a special dress



**b) The introduction of territorial jurisdiction**

This was an important event in the evolution of the government of the local Churches. The territorial administrative system of the Church was closely allied with the civil administration of the Roman Empire. The Roman Emperor Diocletian had divided the Empire into prefectures, dioceses and provinces. The diocese was an administrative district of the Empire. The sixth canon of the first Council of Nicaea speaks about the territorial division of the ancient Churches<sup>21</sup>. The bishops of a particular province used to gather together and discuss their common problems in the councils. The ecclesiastical head of a province had the name of Metropolitan. With the granting of political favours and privileges the Pastoral office of the bishops began to be called *jurisdiction*, a term from Roman law. A new distinction was gradually made between the *power of jurisdiction* and the *power of order*<sup>22</sup>. It was subsequent to the *Decretum Gratiani*. The introduction of the word *hierarchy* marks a new attitude towards the ecclesiastical authority<sup>23</sup>.

**c) The patriarchal system of government**

This was the spontaneous development of the ecclesial relations of the early centuries. The Metropolitans of the important ecclesiastical centres became the head of their own individual Churches. The Patriarchal centres were Rome, Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople and Jerusalem. By the fifth century the Persian

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namely the tunic and belt. This was the monastic habit and an innovation. Hitherto, the dress of priests had been exactly the same as that of other men. Even in the celebration of the Liturgy they merely wore clean clothes. Celestine wrote to the bishops of Narbone province: "We should be distinguished from others not by our dress but by our knowledge, by our behaviour and manner of life" (P. L. 50, 431).

21. C. Kirch, *Enchiridion Historiae Antiquae*, No. 406.

22. Klaus Morsdorf, article on Jurisdiction in *Sacramentum Mundi*, Vol. III, pp. 229-31.

23) Robert Markus, *op. cit.* pp. 9-16: The author explains historically the background of the introduction of the word "hierarchy" in the Church. He seems to attribute it to a Syrian monk who wrote around the year 500 under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite.



Church also developed into a Patriarchate. According to the ancient traditions of the Eastern Churches the Patriarch with the Permanent Synod of Bishops constituted the highest authority of an individual Church. Letters of communion were exchanged mutually among these Patriarchs. The Eastern Churches freely elected their own Patriarchs and regulated their discipline, liturgy and ecclesical life. The Pope was the Bishop of Rome variously designated Metropolitan of the Roman Province, Primate of Italy, Patriarch of the Western Church and head of the Patriarchs.

#### d) The Pope: King of the Papal States

From the middle of the eighth century to the second half (754-1870) of the nineteenth the Pope was also the King of the Papal States in Central Italy. Historians point out four reasons for their formation<sup>24</sup> the Lombard wars, the weakness of the Byzantine emperors, religious disputes and the alliance between the Papacy and Franks. Through the donations of wealthy men the Papacy became the largest landholder in Italy. This territory was known as the 'Patrimony of St. Peter'. The papal influence was on the increase for the defence of Italy from invaders. In 754 Pope Stephen cast off the semblance of allegiance to the Emperor of Constantinople by signing a political treaty with the Franks. It was indeed a turning-point in the history of the Papacy and the whole of Europe.

#### e) Separation between the East and the West

Tensions had already developed in the relations between the papacy and the other ancient Patriarchal Churches. In the eleventh century the official separation between the Churches of Constantinople and Rome took place. It had its climax in mutual excommunications which paved the way for unilateral development in the East as well as the West. Rome began to create more Latin Patriarchates even in the East. The Crusaders from the West were the agents and valiant promoters of the Latin form of Christianity in the East. Many of the churches and shrines of the Eastern rites were plundered and the relics taken to the West. All these atrocities added fuel to the fire. The East

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24. Neil and Schmandt, History of the Catholic Church, Milwaukee, 1957, p. 134.



was alienated from the West. Meanwhile the papacy grew into a great Western political force. The councils and canonical collections of the Latin Church of the subsequent centuries were mainly based on Western traditions<sup>25</sup>. The absence of the Eastern Churches was conspicuous. While all the ecumenical Councils of the first millennium were convoked in the East the councils of the second millennium were exclusively conducted in the West.

Against this background the Roman Curia developed into a great organization on a monarchical pattern. Its various offices gradually began to deal with the problems of the other Churches. The fourth Lateran Council and the subsequent organizational developments of the Roman Church bear ample evidence of the all-embracing centralizing tendency of the Roman Church. The various Roman Congregations which came into existence during this period constitute the backbone of this structure. This tendency of a centralized system of government continued upto Vatican II. But 'mainly owing to the contribution of some Eastern Fathers and the atmosphere of ecumenical openness fostered by Pope John XXIII, some changes are noticeable. It is to be hoped that these may create an atmosphere for a more balanced relationship between the East and the West. Vatican II admits the right of self-government of the Churches:

"History, tradition, and numerous ecclesiastical institutions manifest luminously how much the universal Church is indebted to the Eastern Churches. This Sacred Synod therefore, not only honours this ecclesiastical and spiritual heritage with merited esteem and rightful place, but also unhesitatingly looks upon it as the heritage of Christ's universal Church. For this reason, it solemnly declares that the *Churches of the East as much as those of the West, fully enjoy the right, and are duty bound, to rule themselves*".<sup>26</sup>

This brief historical survey is intended to have an idea of the development of Church authority during the course of centuries.

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25. Yves Congar analyses the problem of the ecumenicity of the ecumenical councils of the second millennium in a richly documented article "Church Structures and Councils" in the review *One in Christ*, 1975, No. 3, pp. 224-266.

26. Decree of Vatican II on Oriental Churches, art. 5.



The structural evolution of the Church is the outcome of these ideological attitudes and approaches.

### III. The Christian concept of Authority

There are instances where the Apostles revealed their ambition for power and prestige. For them Messiah was a glorious king who would liberate the Chosen People from a foreign yoke and establish a triumphant kingdom of their own. The sons of Zebedee with their mother provide a typical example of this quest for power and recognition in the new kingdom. The evangelists Mathew, Mark and Luke narrate this incident (Mt 20, 20-28; Mk. 10, 35-45; Lk. 22, 24-27). To their request for privileged positions Our Lord gives the answer:

“You know that rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but who ever be great among you must be your servant, and who ever be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”<sup>27</sup>.

It is clear that the “authority” which Christ gave is not of the pattern of civil authority. Before Pilate, Christ asserted that His power was not of a worldly kind<sup>28</sup>. The pagan rulers governed their subjects by use of their power and pomp. Their dominion was maintained by legal sanctions and a well-disciplined army which saw that the laws were observed and that those who went against them were punished. The territorial divisions of the kingdom and the legal co-ordination and subordination of all those who were put in charge of maintaining law and order constituted the juridical structure of the kingdom. The subjects had to obey them and follow their lead. This kind of discipline is explained by the centurion: “For I am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, “Go”, and he goes, and to another “Come”, and he comes; and to my slave “Do this” and he does it”<sup>29</sup>.

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27. Mt 20, 25-28.

28. Jn 18, 36

29. Lk 7, 8



But Jesus said that it should not be so among his followers. The leaders among the Christians should be their servants<sup>30</sup>. Christ put himself forward as the model. The self-emptying of Christ manifested at Bethlehem reached its peak on the altar of Calvary. This is the model he prescribed to those who are appointed to be leaders among his followers. The Evangelist's statement that he went about doing good reveals his disposition and attitude to others.

In the first Letter of St. Peter, its author is well aware of the particular nature of authority among the Christians. He advises the co-elders to be on their guard against the temptation to get power, prestige, and privileges. He wrote to them telling to "Tend the flock of God that is in your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but by being examples to the flock"<sup>31</sup>. St. Paul calls himself and his collaborators "the stewards of the mysteries of Christ"<sup>32</sup>.

Stewards do not possess authority.<sup>33</sup> They administer it in the name of the person whom they serve. The conferment of stewardship does not guarantee that all the steward's doings will be approved by his master. He should take the maximum care that the lordship of his master is always maintained. Secondly, the

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30. John L. McKenzie, *Authority in the Church*, London, 1966, p. 11-13.

31. I Pet. 5, 2-3)

32. I Cor. 4, 1-2.

33. Yves Congar, op. cit. p. 122. The author analyses the ministerial role of authority: "We possess nothing: there is only one *dominus* the Lord, who established the various offices, distributing his gifts to each one individually according to his will I Cor. 12, 4-7. Hence there cannot be any *dominatio*, any possession, any spirit of possessiveness. Hence the law of the Christian life is that we should consider ourselves as stewards of God; gifts which are for the good of all: "as every man has received grace ministering the same one to another: as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (I Pet. 4, 10; cfr. Gal: 5, 13; Rom 15, 14; I Cor. 9, 19-23; 2 Cor. 1, 4; 5, 5; Col. 3, 16; I Thess. 3, 15; Hebr. 3, 1310, 24-25).



steward should know that he is entitled to administer affairs only according to the will of his master. He has no right to act against the interests of his lord. If he does he abuses his stewardship and acts against the very intention of the master.

In the Church, the ministers are "stewards of the mysteries of Christ". They do not possess authority, but administer it. The ministers in the Church have their authority from Christ. He is the only owner of authority. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."<sup>34</sup> Authority in the Church is that which was given by its founder. Secondly, this authority was intended for the benefit of others.<sup>35</sup> As stewards they are the dispensers of the new economy of salvation and messengers of the word of God. They are appointed for others "*ex hominibus assumptus et pro hominibus constituitur*".<sup>36</sup> Thirdly, as Christ's stewards, they have to act faithfully according to the will of Christ. They have no right to act against the explicit command of the Lord, Jesus Christ. Their ministry should necessarily be measured by the standards established by Christ. Fourthly they should always be well aware of the fact that it is the continued action of the spirit of Christ which renders their ministry meaningful and valid. Jesus Christ is not at all like a master who gives authority to his stewards and then goes away leaving the entire administration and responsibility to them. In every sacramental act of the Church Christ continues to be the One who works behind the scenes. When Peter baptized, it was Christ who baptized. When a minister celebrates the Eucharist, it is Christ who is the real celebrant. Thus Christ's continued and effective presence cannot be ignored in and behind the ministerial role of the "stewards of the mysteries of Christ."

Thus authority in the Church is really holy (hiera) in its origin, goal, conditions, and exercise.

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34. Mt. 28, 18

35. St. Augustine used to remind his flock: *Vobis sum episcopus, vobis vobiscum christianus*, Sermo, 340, 1 (P. L. 38, 1483) cfr also sermo 56, 11, 135, 7).

36. Hebr. 5, 1.



#### IV. Law is not a substitute for love

The Church has its own laws. But, its basic law is love. It is indeed miserable to view the Church merely in terms of law.<sup>37</sup> The function of authority in the Church is to foster and maintain unity in charity. The ministers of the Church are the presidents and promoters of love. The restoration of the world in Christ has to be achieved by means of this unity in charity. As a servant of the people of God authority in the Church has the role of promoting unity in love. "Love, not law, is the basic constitution of the Church; if love fails, law is no substitute".<sup>38</sup> Law is not part of Paul's preaching. Yet he speaks about the law of Christ and the law of the Spirit in Christ Jesus. He finds himself responsible to Christ as a steward.<sup>39</sup>

The New Testament is not a new set of laws;<sup>40</sup> it is Jesus Himself, and not a code of precepts, who provides the norm of life. The new Law is essentially based on love, and mutual love is the distinguishing mark of the Christian Community. "A new

37. Yves Congar, *op. cit.* p. 140: "In short, legalism is characteristic of an ecclesiology unrelated to spiritual anthropology, and for which the word *ecclesia* indicates not so much the body of the faithful as the system, the apparatus, the impersonal depositary of the system of rights whose representatives are the clergy or, as it is now called, the hierarchy, and ultimately the Pope and the Roman Curia. It is a fact that" Church is sometimes understood by the theorists of ecclesiastical power or papal authority as indicating clerics, priests and the Pope.

38. Cfr. J. L. McKenzie, *op. cit.* p. 116.

39. Cfr. John Dalrymple and others, *op. cit.* 35.

40. Robert Murray, *op. cit.* p. 16. The author analyses the historical background of the strange development of ecclesiastical power in the West: A fateful development came in the twelfth to the thirteenth centuries when Churchmen began to adopt the secular term 'jurisdiction' which belonged to Roman civil law, and the authority of Christ's commission came to be split up into the power of jurisdiction and the power of order . . . . . the stage was set for an ecclesiology which saw authority in the Church as power that could be brought under the same general headings as civil authority".



commandment I give you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another".<sup>41</sup> The mission of the Church is to present Christ in living witness. The primary preoccupation of Church ministers should be to become authentic messengers of Christ's love by living according to the Gospel rather than to reduce Christ's teaching to subtle and precise doctrinal formulations. There is no greater bond of unity among men than that which is based on love. The communion in Spirit is the real unity among the followers of Christ. It is the "same Spirit and the varieties of service..... it is the same God who inspires them all in every one."<sup>42</sup> Paul does not hesitate to be the champion and preacher of love which is the supreme law of the Church.<sup>43</sup>

The Gospel is a covenant and it extends the invitation to all for communion with God which is to be manifested in unity and love among the followers of the Gospel. This goal can be achieved only by genuine love which is not a product of legal enforcement by leaders, but the natural outcome of the freedom of the Spirit. It is for this goal that the Apostle advised the Ephesians: "I, therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called..... for bearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace."<sup>44</sup>

When the nature and the mission of the Church are made clear, the function of authority in her becomes evident. She is a divine institution and her authority is necessarily divine. This divine aspect should not be limited to a part of the Church as the whole of her is animated by the Holy Spirit. The Church, we know, is the Body of Christ. Among the members of the Church, the difference is in the functions.<sup>45</sup> We should not make a duality between the Church and authority in the Church. As

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41. Jn 13, 34-35.

42. I Cor, 12, 4-11.

43. Cfr. I Cor. 13.

44. Eph. 4, 1-3.

45. I Cor. 12, 11f.



the whole Church is divine the function of authority is also divine. The members of the Church should see Jesus Christ in all the members. This reciprocal seeing of Christ constitutes the Christian community of love. The function of authority in the Church is to maintain this unity in the Spirit in the bond of love and to lead all to the Freedom of the Children of God.

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## Authority in Pauline Theology

Writing or speaking on the concept of authority in the Bible is both a difficult and delicate task: difficult because the ideas we get from it have their own ambiguity and polarization; delicate because any discussion of this topic is closely bound up with fear and anxiety on the part of those who are supposed to be the guardians of authority and a consequent mistrust in the people who dare to write or speak anything about authority and freedom in the Church. The confidence and encouragement offered by Vatican II seem sometimes to be, in practice, denied, and one can only believe that the tension between authority and freedom, between authority and responsibility, is but the natural sign of a living Church. Where there is no tension between freedom and authority in the Church, it would mean that either freedom or authority had vanished; and neither the defenders of authority nor the defenders of freedom, however devoted they may be to their causes, can really hope for the disappearance of the opposite pole.<sup>1</sup>

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1. J. L. McKenzie, *Authority in the Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966), p. 162.



It is with this sense of Christian optimism that an attempt is made here to analyse the concept of authority in Pauline theology, rich as it is in all aspects of theological insights. This is especially true of the concept of authority because Paul is one who lived through the early years of the foundation of the Church, a time when the apostolic Church was trying to define herself and find out her own inner nature. The Pauline writings, all of them coming in the time-span of about 15 years, from 50 to 66 A. D., offer valuable insights into how Paul understood the Church and Church authority, Christian freedom and responsibility.

As a first step towards this study mention may be made of the four-fold division of the Pauline *corpus*, a division by which we can situate Paul's concept of authority expressed therein: (1) Early Letters (1 and 2 Thes); (2) Manor Letters (Gal, 1 and 2 Cor, Rom); (3) Prison (Captivity) Letters (Phil, Col, Philm, Eph); and (4) Pastoral Letters (1 Tim, Tit, 2 Tim). The Pauline authorship of the last group is still a matter of dispute and no attempt is made here to discuss that problem. It will have to be taken into account when the concept of authority in Pauline theology is discussed. As a rule, what we note in the various writings of Paul is a gradual development of his theological ideas, and this is especially true with regard to his understanding of the Church. This is important because Paul's understanding of authority cannot be detached from his understanding of the Church as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

Whereas in the beginning the word 'church' or 'church of God' referred only to the Jerusalem Church or to the churches throughout Judea (Acts 9:31; Gal 1:22; 1 Thes 2:14), it slowly became extended also to individual churches among the Gentiles (Rom 16:1, 4). Moreover, the specific title "Church of God", a title almost exclusively used for the Jerusalem Church, was now attributed to the Church of Corinth (1 Cor 1:2). Col and Eph develop this thought further and we have there the idea of

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2. Cf. J. Pathrapankal, "Local Church and Universal Church in Pauline Theology" *Vidyajyothi* (in print); E. Schweizer, *Church Order in the New Testament* (Studies in Biblical Theology, 32) (London: SCM Press, 1961), pp. 105 ff.



the universal Church which is presented as the Body and Bride of Christ (Col 1:18; Eph 1:22-23; 5:23-32). In Eph 1:22-23 Paul, understands the Church as the 'fulness of Christ who fills all in all where we have a picture of what is called the cosmic Church. Paul makes use of several images and metaphors to bring out the inner nature of the Church. Thus the Church is the 'Israel of God' (Gal 6:16), 'the Building and Temple of God' (1 Cor 3:9, 16; 6:19; Eph 2:21-22), 'Body of Christ' (1 Cor 12; Rom 12:4-8; Col 1:19; Eph 2:22-23), and the 'Bride of Christ' (Eph 5:23-32; 2 Cor 11:2).

The Pastoral Letters present the Church as a great sociological reality. These letters are concerned with questions of Church organisation and government, with the regulation and stabilization of ecclesiological conditions, with pastoral instructions for bearers of the various offices in already quite complex situations. A kind of hierarchy of bishops, elders and deacons is evident. The teaching rests not so much on the gospel as on the Apostolic tradition. Timothy is asked to give sound doctrine (1 Tim 1:10). The Church is the 'pillar and bulwark of truth' (1 Tim 3:15), a holy institution, a firmly based and well-furnished house, in which it is possible to move and which possesses its own order. That is made even clearer through the comparison drawn in 1 Tim 3:5 with the earthly house of a family. Thus the Church in the Pastoral Letters assumes a more institutional appearance with its own structures. The civic virtues are insisted on; the conflict with heresies causes difficulties, and a more rigorous order and discipline are becoming apparent.

In any discussion on authority in the Church it has been customary to have recourse to these Pastoral Letters as the most important source for defining the nature of authority in the Church. The importance of the Pastoral Letters as such is not denied. But in exegesis we must remember that the earlier and undisputed letters of Paul enjoy a priority of origin and originality because they are closer to Jesus'—gospel in time and factual situation, while the Pastoral Letters constitute a derived witness, in spite of their Pauline claims.



### Pauline understanding of authority as related to the charismatic nature of the Church

According to Paul the Church is primarily a Spirit-filled community<sup>3</sup> and as such is charismatic by its very nature. He repeatedly mentions the charisms which are granted to every Christian in the measure of his God-given grace. He wrote long chapters on the charismatic structure of the Church, and it is presupposed and constantly in the background throughout his other letters. To rediscover this charismatic nature of the Church is to rediscover the real ecclesiology of Paul, and that in its turn is to find out the basis and background of Church authority according to Paul.<sup>4</sup>

The Church is constituted of individual Christians all of whom are baptised into Christ, have put on Christ and have become one person with Christ (Gal 3:26-29). They are all baptized into one Body by one Spirit as a result of which racial, social and other discriminations are no more valid (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:11). The newness of this community is expressed in such terms as 'new creation' (2 Cor 5:17), 'new man' (Eph 2:15), and the 'new covenant' community (2 Cor 3:6). Centred around Christ this new people of God grow into the fulness of the Body of Christ (Eph 2:21-22).

Paul took special care to show that this community is not a society in which there are superiors and subjects. Rather, he insisted on the equality and unity of all the members.<sup>5</sup> Even when he compared this community with a human body, his main

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3. Cf. J. Lerch, "The Spirit-filled Community" *Clergy Monthly* 31 (1967) 163.

4. Cf. H. Küng, "The charismatic structure of the Church" *Concilium* IV, 1 (1965) 23-33.

5. Cf. Y. Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church* (Baltimore: Helicon, (1964) pp. 99-100: "The relationship of superiority and subordination is ... always of the Lord and in the Lord. Not only in the sense, which we know only too well from pronouncements designed to inculcate obedience, that subordinates must consider their superiors as representing God himself and bearing in their person the majesty of God, but in the sense that



concern was to show that "though many, we are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Rom 12:5). As a body has many members and each member has its own specific role to play, so the Church has her several members each having his own function to fulfil in it.

It is in this context that Paul gives a full description of the charisms in the Church.<sup>6</sup> A charism is a special gift of the Holy Spirit given to individual for the common good (1 Cor 12:7). Many of them are ordinary, and a few are extraordinary.

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superiors and subordinates must serve God and men, confessing that all is God's grace for all and through all, according to the order in which God has placed each one of us. The superior has indeed a position of authority, but a brotherly community of service: in the midst of the faithful he is 'quasi unus ex aliis'.... We must sacrifice, abandon our human relationships in the form in which we receive them from the physical world of our first birth, which consists of two terms only: man and woman, master and servant; and we must receive them afresh from the hand of the Father as Christian relationships, and let them shape our lives 'in the Lord', so that we live in the unique relationship of love of God, of Christ, and of men as God and Christ love them, or better, of the very love with which God and Christ love them."

6. Cf. 'Cardinal Suenens' defence of the charismatic dimension of the Church: "The remarks made about the charism of the Christian people are so few that one could get the impression that charismata are nothing more than a peripheral and unessential phenomenon in the life of the Church. Now, the vital importance of these charismata for building up the Mystical Body must be presented with greater clarity and consequently at greater length. What is to be completely avoided is the impression that the hierarchical structure of the Church appears as an administrative apparatus with no intimate connection with the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit which are spread throughout the life of the Church." (Cf. *Council Speeches of Vatican II*, ed. Y. Congar, H. Küng and D. O'Hanlon (London: Sheed & Ward, 1964), 11. 18-21.



With these charisms and with the supreme charism of love (1 Cor 13) to control and regulate all others, all members of the Church have to work together in order to build up the Church. Paul gives a list of various charisms that existed in the Church and the details do not always agree among themselves.<sup>7</sup> It was not Paul's intention to give a systematic description of charisms. His treatment was called for by the confusion created in the Christian communities regarding their understanding of the role of charisms. Paul was aware of the fact that the Spirit distributes them in a variety of ways which are beyond human comprehension. So he wrote to the Corinthians: "You were enriched in him in every way..... so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift" (1 Cor 1:5, 7). As Corinthians are said to be excelling in everything (2 Cor 8:7), God is able to provide them with every blessing in abundance (2 Cor 9:8).

All these charisms were meant for service. The varieties believers enjoyed came from the same Spirit and they were the basis for the varieties of ministries of the same Lord, the power for which came from the same God who inspired all of them (1 Cor 12:4-6). It is interesting to note that in the lists given by Paul there is no mention of authority (*exousia*) at all. A word that may come close to the idea of authority is 'administrator' (*kybernetes*) (1 Cor 12:28), and that comes towards the end of a list of eight charisms. All are for service, and hence administration too. Paul was trying to spell out the mind of Christ, of whom everyone of his followers, and especially those in charge of the community, should be servants and helpers.

In his letter to the Ephesians Paul refers to the Church as built upon the foundation of the Apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone (Eph 2:20). This statement makes it abundantly clear that the Church has a twofold principle of continuity: the Apostolic ministry and the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup> The former refers to the historical continuity, and the

7. Cf. Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; 12:28; Eph 4:7-11.

8. Cf. Y. Congar, "The Holy Spirit and the Apostolic Body, Continuator of the Work of Christ" in *Mission and Witness* ed. P. J. Burns, (London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1965), pp. 275-312.



latter means the abiding presence of the Spirit in the Church which makes the Church charismatic.<sup>9</sup> The Apostles had to continue the Incarnate Son, and the Spirit was to continue the Risen One. The specific role the historical Jesus played in being the servant (Mk 10:45) the Spirit has always to remind the apostles and those who follow them to put into practice (Jn 14:26). This the Spirit does through the prophets of the NT. The Spirit makes no innovations, He does not create anything that bears no relation to the work of Christ. He builds up this Church by means of his apostles and his prophets. These might be called his agents whom he has empowered to execute his work in the time of his absence, his 'vicars' on earth. They are not opposed to each other; rather they complement each other, giving the Church historical roots and making it existentially dynamic (Acts 1:8; 5:32). The various charisms are further expressions of these two. They all work together for building up the body of Christ until it attains the maturity of completed growth (Eph 4:12-13). The trouble starts only when one tries to identify the prophetic office with the Apostolic.

The aim so far has been to show that the Church is not a mere institution built on the Apostles and continued through their successors who play the role of exercising the authority of Christ. What they have to do is to continue the very ministry of Christ, and the dynamism of the ministry they have to get from the Spirit of Christ who makes Christ really present among them and in the community as such. The fact that in the early Church the Spirit worked through the Apostles is no proof that he works only through their successors. The Spirit works through all the members of the Church, sometime even outside the bounds of the Church.

It has been the great achievement of Vatican II to have re-established this fundamental fact and the profound consequences in our understanding of Church authority<sup>10</sup>. The sharing of all God's people in Christ's prophetic office means simply that

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9. K. McNamara "The Holy Spirit in the Church" *ITQ* 32 (1965) 281-294; J. L. McKenzie, *op. cit.* pp. 55 ff.

10. J. P. Keating, "Theory of Authority and Vatican II" *Worsip* 41 (1967) 229-230.



the whole people, communally and individually, is anointed, filled and moved by the Holy Spirit (Lg 12). The Spirit is not said to live in a kind of abstract Church as such but in the individual Christian. Every Christian is directly enlightened by the Spirit and this plainly has priority over any human enlightenment (1 Jn 1: 20, 27). This pneumatic character of the whole Church and of each individual takes shape in two directions. The spirit produces in the Church (1) the 'sense of faith' (*sensus fidei*) and (2) the various charisms. Because of the working of the Spirit the whole Church, the whole universality of the faithful, cannot be deceived in the faith. It is not a new source of revelation; rather it is the work of the Holy Spirit who grants the people of God this common consent as they believe in God's revelation (1 Thes 2: 13). It is an obedience to the power of the Spirit in the Church. This obedience to the Spirit is made all the more possible through the charisms which the Spirit imparts to each and all individuals of the faithful.

It is within the framework of this new break-through in understanding the Church and the role of the individual Christian – a real contribution made by Pauline theology – that we have to evaluate the meaning of authority in the Church as Paul understands it. Any attempt to pin the concept of authority in the Church on such passages as Rom 13: 1–7, where Paul obviously speaks about the state authority of the Roman emperor, is absolutely wrong. There is no theology of authority in this section, much less a theology of Church authority. Paul asks his readers to entertain, with regard to state authorities, feelings of respect and fear; but he takes care not to speak of the attachment of Christians to the state, still less of love for it.

### Authority and Freedom in the Spirit

If the Church is charismatic by its very nature, it is the Spirit that guides her and her authority is the authority of the Spirit. All the members of the Church are to live under this authority. The indispensable condition for being under the authority of the Spirit is what Paul calls freedom in the Spirit<sup>11</sup>.

11. J. Pathrapankal, "Spirit, Authority and Obedience in the charismatic structure of Religious Life" *In Christo* 6 (1968) 3–11; H. Küng, *Freedom Today* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), pp. 34 ff.



It would seem anomalous to think of freedom and authority as coming together under one reality. But in Pauline theology Christian life is intrinsically characterised by the freedom in the Spirit, a freedom by which the believers can experience the Spirit and address God as 'Abba, Father'. As against the slavery under the Law which makes man unauthentic, Paul wanted Christians to be free and nothing less: "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery", Paul wrote to the Galatians (5: 1).

The Spirit which descended on the Apostles on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and founded the Church was understood to be a vital element in the authority of the Church in so far as he would teach the disciples all things (Jn 14: 26) and would guide them in to all truth (Jn 16: 13). To that extent the Apostles are also under the authority of the Spirit and all should be prepared to recognize the diversity of the operation of the Spirit in various members. No one has every office, but all have the Spirit which inspires all offices. Beyond all these offices there is the one charism that the Spirit gives to all and it is this charism which constitutes the tangible reality of the authority and power of the Spirit: *agape*. This is the climactic operation of the Spirit, the work which is most truly the work of the Church and the fulfilment of the mission of Jesus.

Here we can see the intrinsic relation between authority and freedom. Both of them have the origin in the Spirit and both point to one and the same goal. Authority is at the service of freedom, and freedom in its turn is at the service of authority. The combined force of this mutual assistance is the charism of love. In the last analysis it can be even said that every charism has its own authority and its own freedom, and both work together through love. Hence we see that authority is not and cannot be absolute, for authority, too, has its interdependence.

Freedom in the Spirit, which makes the authority of the Spirit and Church authority meaningful and fruitful, is to be clearly distinguished from what Paul calls the freedom of the flesh or the freedom of the natural man. It is only those who open themselves to the freedom of the Spirit who can submit to the



authority of the Spirit and to the challenge of love. Paul was keen on this point. The freedom which the Spirit gives is not licentiousness; it is not a permit for irresponsible living. Paul writes: "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be enslaved by anything" (1 Cor 6: 12). Freedom means responsibility, and responsibility means the ability to respond to the authority of the Spirit. That is why Paul could say: "All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful, but not all things build up" (1 Cor 10: 23).

While radically upholding the freedom and liberty of the Christians, Paul opposes the tendencies of the Corinthians implied in the expression: "All things are lawful" on two grounds: (1) the principle of what is fitting and (2) the principle of what is edifying. The first refers to the man who uses his freedom, the other refers to the neighbour whether it helps him or not. In the first there is the idea that there is no freedom without danger, for there always lurks the peril of a new bondage, a new enslavement (1 Cor 6: 1-), so Paul makes a clear distinction between the freedom of the flesh and the freedom of the Spirit. The former reveals itself in the works of the flesh (Gal 5: 19-21) and the latter expresses itself in the fruit of the Spirit, the first of which is love (Gal 5: 22-23). Paul adds: "There is no law necessary to guide them, no authority to control them" (v. 23) because they are already under the authority of the Spirit.

### Was Paul an Authoritarian?

After all this discussions about the Pauline insight into the charismatic nature of the Church and the meaning of Christian freedom one question still comes up. Was not Paul an authoritarian? In his attitude to the Churches he founded was he not treating the Christians as babies? He writes to the Corinthians: "I could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh; and behaving like ordinary men?" (1 Cor 3: 1-3).



Paul made his decisions and issued his warnings and commands on his own personal authority. True, at the beginning of his ministry, he had gone to Jerusalem to receive, as it were, the *imprimatur* of it the Church there on this gospel and his work (Gal 2: 1-10). Even then it was his policy not to be too yielding, but to prove his equality with the 'pillars' in all matters. He even made bold to criticise Peter in public for his want of consistency and he gave himself credit for write it down in his letter (Gal 2: 11-14). Moreover, when it was a matter of dealing with the congregations he had founded, he did everything on his own personal authority. Paul never felt shy of using the word 'I'. He took a certain delight in it, it would seem. "I Paul say to you" (Gal 5: 2); "I Paul myself entreat you" (2 Cor 10: 1); "I warned those who sinned before and all others, and I warn them now" (2 Cor 13: 2). He speaks of the "things which we command" (2 Thes 3: 4, 6). He insists on unquestioning obedience to what he says (2 Cor 2: 9). He is ready to punish every disobedience (2 Cor 10: 6). The congregation is warned to have nothing to do with anyone who will not accept the authority of Paul (2 Thes 3: 14). "My advice is this" (1 Cor 7: 8, 35), he writes. "About other things I will give you directions when I come." (1 Cor 11: 34)<sup>12</sup>.

His exercise of his authority is very conspicuous in the case of excommunication of the incestuous man (1 Cor 5: 1-13) and in the matter of women covering their heads (1 Cor 11: 2-16). In the latter case he excludes all possibility of dialogue with a statement: "If anyone wants to argue about it, all I have to say is that neither we nor the churches of God have any other habit in worship" (1 Cor 11: 16). In the former case he wants the culprit to be handed over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord (1 Cor 5: 5). Paul says that he has delivered Hymenaeus and Alexander to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme (1 Tim 1: 20).<sup>13</sup>

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12. W. Barclay, *By what Authority?* (London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974) pp. 111 ff.

13. The expression 'delivering to Satan' was probably used when a man was cast out of the Synagogue. It stems from God's words to Satan about Job. God gave Satan permission to submit Job to any test, provided his life was spared (cf. Job 2:6).



Such instances could be multiplied. He writes to the Corinthians: "Even if I boast a little to much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying, I shall not be put to shame" (2 Cor 10:8). "I write this while I am away from you, in order that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority which the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down" (2 Cor 13:10). When the Corinthians extolled Apollo at the expense of Paul he was almost infuriated. He claimed to be the 'father' of the Corinthians whereas all others are only guides (1 Cor 4:15). He took delight in addressing his converts as "beloved children" (1 Cor 4:14) "little children" (Gal 4:19), but also "foolish Galatians" (Gal 3:1). It is true that he usually addressed his converts as "brethren". The general impression given is that of a modern disciplinarian placing his finger on any issue and giving the last word on it.

If one were to stop with this picture of Paul, he would seem one of the most authoritarian leaders of the Church. The most important thing to remember in evaluating these various issues is the specific role Paul had to play in defining the nature of the Church for centuries to come. Paul was a man of convictions and he lived by them. The great sacrifice he made in becoming a follower of Christ (Phil 3:4-14) and his sincere efforts in making the Gospel known to others were misunderstood and criticised by the so-called "super-apostles" of Corinth and the Judaizers of the Galatian Churches. They were bent on arguing that Paul was no Apostle and that he had no right to be an authentic preacher of the Gospel. Paul asserted his authority because it was questioned. It was criticism against him that although "his letters are strong, his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account" (2 Cor 10:10). More than that it was all a question of misunderstanding the very nature of the Gospel. Many of the adversaries of Paul wanted to make Christianity another sect within Judaism, one which accepted Jesus as the Messiah. It was an "articulus stantis aut cadentis" of the Gospel. The problem was acute both in the Churches of Galatia and in that of Corinth. The defensive purpose of his letters to the Corinthians made his treatment more rhetorical than theological. We do not find similar approaches in the other letters to the Churches.



A glance at Paul's letter to the Philippians shows him in a very different perspective. He wrote that letter because he and the Philippians liked each other, and he wished to keep in touch with his friends. As an Apostle, he took the occasion to repeat the proclamation of the Gospel; as a friend he gave them friendly advice. In unconstrained confidence he reveals how much he was identified with that which he proclaimed. Indeed, there was a rare personal relationship between Paul and the Philippians when he said: "Put into practice what you learned and received from me, both from my words and from my deeds" (4: 9). "My friends, beloved friends whom I long for, my joy, my crown, stand thus firm in the Lord, my beloved" (4: 7). He became all things to all men and thus gained all (1 Cor 9: 19 - 22); he also made his own their personal griefs and problems:<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, it was also Paul's task to define the very nature of the apostolic ministry in the early Church. There was a tendency to make the whole mission of the Church dependent on the 'Twelve', but these 'Twelve' understood their role as sitting on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt 19: 28; Lk 22:30). What one sees in the approaches and attitude of Paul is not so much the struggle of a man to seize upon a new position, or to retain something which he had, as to define and maintain the identity of apostleship and to demythologize some of the wrong ideas that had crept into the practice of the early Church. The arrival of Paul made a radical change in the very nature and concept of apostolic ministry. Though the title 'apostle' was applied to others besides the Twelve, the tendency was strong in the early Church to make this more a static office than a dynamic one. It was not so much a fight for position and honour as a struggle for the truth of the Gospel and an attempt to restore the meaning of ministry as established by Christ himself. This is made clear from the fact that Paul had to undergo much suffering and persecution precisely for being the Apostle. In his own estimation he considered himself to be 'the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle for having persecuted the Church of God' (1 Cor 15: 9), to be one who kept the treasure of his call in earthen vessels (2 Cor. 4: 7), "always

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14. Cf. J. L. McKenzie, *op. cit.* pp. 52 ff.



carrying in his body the death of Jesus" (2 Cor 4: 10, 11). The description of the sufferings and persecutions Paul had to undergo (2 Cor 11: 24-28) is clear proof of how he understood his apostolic ministry. Luke records the words of Paul addressed to the elders of Ephesus: "I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20: 24).

### The myth and mystery of authority

Paul has made it very clear that authority in the Church is service and that any attempt to make it a title of honour would misrepresent the Church and misguide the Christians. The problem of the Biblical concept of authority is not so much its want of clarity as its unattractive and unappealing character. Those who are, in a special way, called to this dimension of ministry in the Church are constantly tempted to regard authority in the Church as a species of authority in general, as the power to give commands, enforce obedience, take action, or make final decisions. The various species such as family authority, political authority and contractual authority are looked upon as models of Church authority.<sup>15</sup> But the Church is neither a political society with jurisdiction, nor a family with dominative power, nor a free contractual association. She is a free association in the sense that its members join by a free, personal decision; she is not a natural society in the sense that her constitution is determined by the human condition antecedent to any personal or collective action. At the same time, it is true that her authority is not based on the contractual agreement of her members. She differs from all other societies in her end and her means and so also the concept of authority.<sup>16</sup>

This does not mean that any development of the idea of authority beyond the NT is illegitimate. As the Church has

15. Cf. "Exousia" in *ThDNT* II, ed. G. Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), pp. 562-574; E. Schweizer, *op. cit* pp. 171 ff.

16. Cf. J. L. McKenzie, "Authority and Power in the NT" *A Theology Reader* ed. R. W. Gleason, (New York: 1966) pp. 294-304.



grown and moved with history and in history, she has had to produce new forms of authority and new uses of authority. Her continuity does not lie in fixity of forms and uses of authority, but in an identity which is deeper than mere structure. The great danger that lurks here is the tendency in those who are involved in this development process to borrow and apply patterns of secular authority. Then comes a period of tolerance of all other forms with the result that what was not opposed becomes established and theologically founded. Abuses of Church authority are then explained as normal expressions when compared with secular authority. Any voice raised against them becomes a protest and a challenge because by then authority has assumed the characteristics of 'holy' and, for that matter, inviolable authority.

This is what is called the 'myth' of authority. A myth is the outcome of a mental and a time process both in their own ways cooperating to create and perpetuate it. It is the result of an inner yearning and a natural process of history. It is the tragedy with such myths that the very objects we create later become objects of adoration and respect. The history of authority in the Church makes it clear that this has happened from the Church of the martyrs to that of present times.<sup>17</sup> In fact authority and the exercise of it in the Church have often been her ignominy and shame, her cross and her passion. What is needed here is a painful process of demythologization, a bold attempt to cut across the opaque and impenetrable barriers of man-made conventions and to get back to the source of a genuine understanding of authority in the Church.<sup>18</sup> The movement back to the sources must go on until it restores a completely evangelical concept of authority, both fully supernatural and fully communal.

The Second Vatican Council was well aware of this task. In the chapter on the hierarchy it reminds the bishops of the NT description of their office: "They are ministers who are servants of their brethren in serving God." 'Servants' means servants, nothing more and nothing less. They have taken up the service of the

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17. H. Y. Congar, *op. cit.* pp. 40. 79.

18. H. Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament* (Questions Disputatae, 3) (London: Herder, 1961) pp. 60ff.



community; they are servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In thus becoming servants of their brethren the pastors of the Church are not doing anything contrary to the nature of their office. They are not to think that they are making a generous condescension just for the sake of the smooth running of the Church in this age of democratic freedom. They are hereby only imitating Christ and doing just what Christ has enjoined on them regarding the nature of authority in the Church.<sup>19</sup>

The ultimate goal of authority, obedience, service, love and whatever else we may bring along in a discussion about the Church, is the creation of a new humanity which should engage itself in the service of the Kingdom of God. What Christ did was not to found another religion among others; his purpose was to initiate a new way of life, a new way of thinking, and a new kind of human relationships and of God-man relationship. The Gospel was not the law; it presented a person and an event, not a doctrine or a code of conduct. The person and the event were presented by proclamation, and this meant not only a verbal presentation, but a personal identification of the preacher with what he preached. The ultimate authority of this was always the living, risen Christ identified with the whole Church. In the building up of this new humanity many people are involved, many charisms are at work. One of them is what is called 'authority'. Its main function is service. It has to be on its guard constantly against all dangers that could come up to destroy and disfigure its original meaning.

Here we come to understand what is called the mystery of the Church authority.<sup>20</sup> The NT is anti-authoritarian in a proper sense. It abhors that type of domination which in the NT world was seen in secular power or in religious authority. On the other hand authority being a gift of the Spirit who is the source of love, it has to be directed to persons, not to ideas or institutions or things. Authority finds the object of its expression in the persons who are members of the body of Christ. Love is the only power which the NT knows.

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19. *L. G.* art 20-27.

20. *JIL. McKenzie, op. cit.* pp. 175 ff.



This is the mystery of authority, a mystery that is part of the mystery of the Church itself; and as mystery it is beyond human understanding. It cannot be discovered by a purely rational analysis, nor is a philosophical conception of authority applicable here. As a mystery, it has to be accepted by faith. The mystery of Church authority is in the fact that its power is the power of love. This love is revealed in the person and teaching of Jesus; the unique love which we call Christian. Christian love is based not on nature but on the life communicated by the Spirit of God. When Church authority uses any other power than the power of love, it ceases to exhibit its distinctively Christian and ecclesial nature. This conception of authority can be understood only by faith, and only by Christian hope can we be assured that it can be effective. It is true that the prudence and wisdom of human experience suggest that such authority will have no genuine power, that it will degenerate into anarchy. The choice then is between whether we want the Church to be the Church of Christ or another human organization.

As a rule the common measure of success in the execution of authority in the Church is the presence of order and discipline. But order and discipline as such do not prove that the Church is attaining her end; only a discipline of love can prove anything meaningful. True, the way of leadership in love is far more difficult and demanding, and the immediate results are often less impressive than the results obtained by a show of power. It follows, therefore, that all those who use authority and those who obey it have to do so in a real spirit of faith and love, faith in the specific nature of Church authority and in love for one another. This assent of faith in the true nature of Church authority is the only protection the Church has against the corruption of authority by secularization and the conversion of authority into a power structure. Faith is the only protection against the adaptation and appropriation of Church authority to the personal ends of those who hold it.

Paul, more than any other NT writer, has led us into this profound understanding of authority in the Church by his rich contribution to the charismatic nature of the Church and also to the meaning of freedom in the Spirit as the hallmark of



Christian life. He explained authority as one of the functions of the Spirit which needs the other functions in order that those of authority may be fulfilled. He put his apostolic authority into practice in realizing that it was a service of love, a service to persons. Like a true leader, he wished his congregations to share his will, not to be subdued by it. His decisions were shared actions as far as he could make them such.

But some would say; "Paul was a unique figure, and small men like our present leaders in the Church must do things in a more efficient way; or else things would not move at all, and move in the wrong way." True, but the factor which made Paul great is still present and active in the Church and is within the reach of small men also. The Church is still the Body of Christ in which the Spirit dwells and acts, if only we become aware of it. Small men do not become great by continuing to do small things in a small way, thinking that it is a big way. They have to really do things in a big way. That big way is not to insist upon one's own authority in and out of place, and to show a certain insecurity when it appears that others may not obey us if they do the things in a different way. The big way is always the way of love, concern, understanding and appreciation. It is acceptance of others as persons in the same way as those in authority are. Paul was simply unconcerned about his position, his dignity or his power over other men; he was always a servant of the Lord and his Church.



# Authority in the "Guru-Sishya" Relationship

S. S. S. S.

The scope of this article is not Indian tradition regarding the guru-sishya relationship and the extent to which this relationship can be extended with the members of the Church for its acceptance. In other words, is the guru-sishya relationship according to the Gospel Spirit? Can the Church learn from this Indian tradition and use it to express some aspects of her life and become credible in our country? There is an intention of writing a comparative study here of the present acceptance of authority in the Church and the Indian idea of spiritual authority. The aim is simply to examine the issues from the point of view of Gospel living.

## Difficulties and Questions

First of all, coming to examine the guru-sishya relationship in the context of Indian accepting the church's authority, it is not easy to find out the real and authentic Gospel spirit, especially because of its richness, diversity and complexity. The Indian tradition is difficult to describe in this manner. Only essential characteristics will be looked for in this analysis.

In India, we have made a large number of people through an interesting religion in a long time. The guru-sishya relationship and other matters. The concept of the guru has been a talk of personal authority, power and wealth. It has been a matter of personal achievement and is sometimes a matter of personal power and wealth. This Indian view of the guru-sishya relationship should not prevent us from discerning what is genuine and authentic within regarding the guru-sishya relationship. The religious history of India contains and involves related to what is said what have realized what a guru really is and have found out the truth. It is from these men that we should like to learn.



## The meaning of 'guru'

The word 'Guru' occurs in Vedic literature for any person of importance such as a father, mother or teacher<sup>1</sup>. Gradually the word began to take on the more precise meaning of teacher. The teacher in the religious and cultural context is called a guru. In the Middle Ages the position gained further credence and he was considered equivalent to God<sup>2</sup>. "The Brahminial exchange just started signified the emergence of guru"<sup>3</sup>. Ultimately the word took the meaning of "The man who is able to remove others from ignorance by experience of the mystery of God which he himself has experienced and he more"<sup>4</sup>. The guru who was considered superior to the beginning, and began to be treated in terms of more or sacred, and divine, later became the object of devotion and worship, representing and mediating the divine<sup>5</sup>. He is a "realised soul who reveals the way to liberation by removing ignorance"<sup>6</sup>. The word slowly took on the meaning of the two syllables "gu" (darkness) and "ru" (one who dispels it). Hence guru is a Sanskrit term is interpreted as one "who by the application of the pollution of knowledge, opens the eyes of one blinded by the darkness of ignorance"<sup>7</sup>. Nathuram Tamra.

It is true to understand the concept of 'guru', one must go back to the educational system in India in ancient times. Education was imparted in a gurukul and Manu Smriti has the following description of a guru "The guru must know that a man who can benefit him by instruction in the Veda, be it law or music, is called in these institutes his "guru ....."<sup>8</sup>.

1. See article "Guru" "Hindu Vaidika" Nagri Prakashan India. Varanasi Vol. 3 p. 466.

2. Ibid.

3. Kankwani Laga "Glossary of India", Illustrated Weekly of India, March 1971 p. 30.

4. Abhinavabharata, "Bharatavarsha" A Christian Approach to Adhara Experience II. I. P. C. K. 1974, p. 242.

5. Indrajit, Ganga Morning 1971 p. 340.

6. Ibid p. 340.

7. Nathuram Tamra.

8. Laws of Manu II No. 149 "Sacred Books of the East" edited by F. Max Müller, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi - Varanasi Pusa Vol. XXV P. 51.



In another place he is described thus: "That Brahmana who performs in accordance with the rules of the Veda, the rites, the garbhadhana and so forth and gives food to the child is called the guru - the venerable one<sup>9</sup> and in No. 40 "They call that Brahmana who initiates a pupil and teaches him the Veda together with the Kalpa and Rahasyas the teacher (acharya) of the latter"<sup>10</sup>.

In the Indian tradition we find the words, 'acharya', 'guru' and 'upadhaya' used indiscriminately. In the Chandogya Upanishad it is said "Acharyavan purusho veda" - one who comes in contact with a good acharya-learns true knowledge. It is clear that the personality and character of acharya was given great importance in the traditional educational system. The same idea is expressed in the Taittiriya Upanishad - "Be one to whom a teacher is as a god"<sup>11</sup>. In Nirukta, the acharya is called this because he imparts "achar" (character) to his students<sup>12</sup>.

In the Taittiriya Upanishad devotion to the guru is not because of his individual nature but because of something deeper in him. The disciple is taught to see in him something beyond his external appearance.

In Indian tradition the following characteristics are enumerated in different sources: (1) The one who dispels darkness, revealer of light (2) the one who destroys the sins of disciple (3) the one who makes the disciple like himself (4) the one who destroys the life of ignorance and grants the life of knowledge (5) the one who has vision (6) the one through whom grace is imparted (7) the one who grants joy and peace to the disciple.

Hence he should be - (1) One who has experienced truth (2) firm in mind (3) without sin (4) God-oriented (5) imbued

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9. Ibid. Laws of Manau II No. 142,

10. Ibid Laws of Mannu II No. 140.

11. Taittiriya Upanishad 1/11/2.

the Thirteen Principal Upanishads edited by R. E. Hume, Oxford University Press p. 281,

12. Nirukta I/4.



with a "Sat" character (6) a man of good conduct (7) a lasting friend of the disciple (8) a well-wisher etc<sup>13</sup>.

Among these characteristics two seem to be demanded by all traditions, first, experience of truth, and secondly a moral character of which he should be an example.

### The importance of the guru

In the history of education and religion the place of the guru is unique in India. His greatness lies in the respect India had for learning truth. India has always been receiving spiritual instruction: "upadesha" from gurus i.e. from men who are supposed to have realized the Divine Presence within themselves. Particularly in the Tantric system he holds a special place. The guru is considered as necessary for knowledge or spiritual liberation. In the Upanishads we find that for the sake of knowledge, the sishya should go, fuel in hand, to a spiritual leader (guru) who is learned in the sacrifices and established on Brahma "Such a knowing (teacher) unto one who has approached properly, whose thought is tranquillized, who has reached peace, teaches in its very truth that knowledge of Brahma whereby one knows the Imperishable, the Person, the True"<sup>14</sup>. Swami Vivekananda states "no knowledge is possible without a teacher"<sup>15</sup>. "In India for everything we want a guru"<sup>16</sup>. "The guru is the bright mask which God wears in order to come to us"<sup>17</sup>. In ancient India "It was considered an evil not to have a guru"<sup>18</sup>. "Whatever the sect of Hinduism, the faith in a living teacher was of fundamental importance. Not the mere book knowledge but what a preceptor of realization imparts directly to true disciple - a branch of learning, a mode of sadhana or a mantra becomes

13. Cfr. Swami Raghawacharya Maharaj "Bharati" July 1960 (Special number on "Guru Mahima".)

14. Mundaka Upanishad 12/12-13.

15. Swami Vivekananda "Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda," Advaita Ashram Calcutta-14. Vol. IV p. 431

16. Ibid p. 286.

17. Ibid Vol. VIII p. 117.

18. Cfr. Pandit Sri Ram Sharma Acharya "Tantra Mahavigyan" (Vol. I) p. 244.



effective”<sup>19</sup>. In the Chandogya Upanishad it is stated “He knows who has a teacher”<sup>20</sup>. This text emphasises that knowledge, particularly the spiritual kind, is efficacious only when one learns directly from a teacher in person and not from a book. This is true of every school of thought in Hinduism. The Rigveda also affirms that “One ignorant of the place asking one who knew and was instructed by the one who knows, goes to his destination”<sup>21</sup>.

The importance of a guru in one’s life is stressed by the medieval Hindi Bhakti poets specially by Kabir (1440-1518 A.D.) – “Guru and my Lord are in front of me, whom shall I salute first. Of course I will salute my guru for it is he who has made the Lord known to me.” The guru is considered a mediator between God and man, and without him it is impossible to attain God.

### The role of the guru

As father to son so is a guru to his disciple. He takes the role of the father and mother. In the Vedic period a student went to the *acharya* and lived there as a member of the *acharyakul*. He found in the *acharya* a father, and in his wife a mother, and there was an atmosphere of love between them. This is expressed in Nirukta. “It is the duty of the disciple that he considers his *acharya* like his father and mother, and let him not, under any circumstances, revolt against him”<sup>22</sup>.

He is considered the one who gives second birth to him and is hence the real progenitor of life as Manu Smrithi states. “But that birth which a teacher acquainted with the whole Veda in accordance with the law procures for him through the Savitri is real – exempt from age and death”<sup>23</sup>. The *Apastamba Dharmasutra* also affirms this: “The teacher gives him a new birth in knowledge and that is the highest birth. Mother and father

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19. Dr. V. Raghavan, *The Indian Heritage*. Indian Institute of World Culture, Bangalore 4 p. 445.

20. *Chandogya Upanishad* 6. 14. 2.

21. *Rigveda* X. 32. 7.

22. *Nirukta* 2/4.

23. *Laws of Manu* II No. 148.



engender his body only."<sup>24</sup> The same concept is affirmed by Sukesh in the *Prasna Upanishad*, the conclusion of the instruction by Pippalada: "Thus far in truth... They praised him and said, you truly are our father. You lead us across to the shore beyond ignorance. Adoration to the Supreme Seers".<sup>25</sup> The Institutes of Vishnu are very explicit in describing this aspect of the guru 'of the natural progenitor and the teacher who imports the Vedas to him. The giver of the Veda is the more venerable father for it is the new existence acquired by his initiation in the Veda which will last him both in this life and the next'.<sup>26</sup> "That existence which his teacher, who knows all the Vedas effects for him through the prescribed rites, that existence is exempt from age and death".<sup>27</sup> "He who fills his ears with holy truths, who frees him from all pain and confers immortality (or final liberation) upon him that man let the student consider as his true father and mother."<sup>28</sup> and again in *sanatsujatiya* it is asserted "But the birth obtained from the preceptor, that verily is true and likewise immortal. He perfects (one) giving immortality".<sup>29</sup> Hence Swami Vivekananda has described the guru as not merely a giver of intellectual knowledge but one who gives rebirth to the soul.<sup>30</sup> An Acharya dealt with *antewasi* (inmates) of the *gurukul*, or disciples, and with his sons, in the same way. In the Atharvaveda and the Mahabharata he is regarded as keeping his disciple in his womb as a mother does. This attitude shows the solicitude of the acharya towards his disciple. There was no scope or necessity for law and order to be enforced in a legalistic way. "Love and do what you wish", could be easily applied. The Acharya was concerned about discipline, but he was more concerned about his own conduct which was an inspiration.

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24. Apostamba Dharma Suthra I, 1, 16, 17, 18 (Max Muller Vol. II).

25. Prasna Upanishad 6/7, 8.

26. The Institute of Vishnu (Max Muller Vol. 7) No. 44.

27. Cfr. Ibid No. XXX, 46

28. Ibid No. 47.

29. Max Muller, Vol. 8 p. 176 Sanatsugatiya IV.

30. C/r. Swami Vivekananda Vol. VIII p. 112.



The concept of 'guru' leads one beyond the shores of this life: and cures all sickness. He gives *brahmavidya*: the guru enables the disciples to know the other side that lies beyond darkness: "You truly are father. You have enabled us to read the other side beyond ignorance"<sup>31</sup> The role of the real guru is to lead his disciple, to help him to attain the real purpose, the aim of life. Hence Swami Vivekananda writes "The real guru is he who leads you beyond this *maya* of endless birth and death, who graciously destroys all the griefs and maladies of the soul."<sup>32</sup> He is a real physician. He cures all illness by a single root and he only has this root. With this root all ailments and troubles disappear." Kabir says "My guru has given me a strange root. It is undescrivable but fills the whole being with nectar." By his arrows the satguru heals every disease and trouble. In a real guru's heart the invisible reveals itself and through him. His light shines in perfect purity - this is the mystery of the guru. He enables the disciple to meet God i. e., the ultimate reality. He is the means of communion with Him. Abbe Dubois, who is a stern critic of Hindu manners and customs, sums up the qualities of a true guru thus:

"A true guru is a man who is in the habit of practising all the virtues; who with sword of wisdom has lopped off all the branches and torn out all the roots of sin, and who has dispersed, with the light of reason, the thick shadows in which sin is shrouded; who, though seated on a mountain of sins, yet confronts their attacks with a heart as hard as a diamond; who behaves with dignity and independence; who has the feelings of a father for all his disciples, who makes no difference in his conduct between his friends and his enemies, but shows equal kindness to both; who looks on gold and precious stones with the same indifference as in pieces of iron or potsherd, and values the one as highly as the other; whose chief care is to enlighten the ignorance in which the rest of mankind is plunged".<sup>33</sup>

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31. Prasna Upanished 6/8.

32. Swami Vivekananda-Vol. VI p. 471.

33. Dubois and Beunchamp "Hindu Manners Customs and Ceremonies - Third Edition. Oxford at the Clarendon Press P. 123.



## The guru – sishya relationship

The mutual responsibility of both and their intimate bond is well expressed in Vedic literature in the well known passage, "Saha navavatu" uttered at the beginning of each day's study. The teacher and his pupil were united by a common aim of preserving and propagating sacred learning and showing its worth in their life and conduct: "May He (i.e. God) protect us both, the preceptor and the disciple. May He nourish as both. May we work together with great energy. May our study be vigorous and fruitful. May love and harmony dwell among us". "Let us together attain fame and the light of knowledge." In Paraskar Grihyasutra 2/2 it is affirmed: "I place thy heart under my will. May my heart follow yours and you enjoy my speech whole hearty. Be pleased in what I say. May Brahaspati yoke thee to me." The relationship between teacher and student was in no sense mercenary but spiritual and sacred, there was no one sided discipline: both had to observe it<sup>34</sup>. The guru and disciple formed a couple, a pair of which the true elements attract one another and adhered to one another, as two poles exist only in relationship to one another<sup>35</sup>. This attitude is possible only when the disciple respected his teacher on the basis of his spontaneous love for his teacher. The Guru really is respected and loved by his disciple. Dr. Mangalders Shastri Says "Acharyas' spontaneous love and affectionate respect for his disciple was the basis of disciple's attraction for his acharya (i.e. Guru)"<sup>36</sup>. We find, in *the Upanishads*, the disciple is addressed by the guru as Somya – i.e. lovable like the moon and filled with good qualities. The disciple had full confidence that the guru really loved him. It is the heart meeting the heart. The communication did not need to be in words. More powerful communication flowed from the guru's personality.

## Communication between guru and disciple

"His (the guru's) communication with the disciple is never through the intermediary of things ..... it transforms the one

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34. R. C. Mazumdar, "History and Culture of the Indian People", Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay. Vol. I p. 523.

35. Abhishiktananda *Guru and Disciple* London SPCK. 167 p.51.

36. Ibid.



who can receive it." The true guru is he who, without the help of words, can enable the attentive soul to hear the voice of God." 'What the guru says springs from the very heart of the disciple'.<sup>37</sup> It is through the darshan-encounter with the guru—that he is able to meet God. "When the master's voice reaches the disciples ear and the master's eye looks deep into his, then from the very depth of his being, from the newly-discovered cave of his heart, thoughts well up which reveal him to himself"<sup>38</sup> Deep bonds of communication are forged between guru and sishya. He is the visible form, the one who alone can show the way.

He should be capable of discerning what suits each person. The ability to discern the charism of the disciple is one of the characteristics of the guru. His humility and dedication to the truth would give to the disciple that trust in him that he would never mislead him. In the Upanishads we find beautiful examples where the guru accepts his limitations and acknowledges his ignorance in certain matters. A disciple is certain of whatever the guru communicates, it is fully true. The truth of a guru's communication is never doubted.

The basis of all obedience seems to be the guru's openness to the truth and goodness.

### Obedience to the guru

Manu Smriti says "Obedience towards these three (teacher, father, mother) is declared to be the best form of austerity"<sup>39</sup>.

*The institutes of Vishnu* says, - "by paying strict obedience to his spiritual teacher (he the disciple) gains the world of Brahman"<sup>40</sup>.

"Faith in the guru is absolutely necessary to build up the relation between two." How one-sided in devotion one has to be in order to build up a spiritual life, how firm in faith and

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37. Abhishiktananda *Guru and Disciple* p. 29.

38. *Abid* p. 29.

39. *Laws of Manu* II No. 229.

40. Cfr. *The Institutes of Vishnu* No. 31 10. Max Muller Vol. VIII p. 128.



strongly devoted to the guru and how deep a reliance has to be placed on his words, and how even one's life has to be laid down for him are questions that demanded the answer of complete surrender<sup>41</sup>. Man is thirsty for true knowledge and the guru was expected to give this. All knowledge is, of course, sacred. Hence it was considered a special privilege to receive this sacred knowledge. Vidya is a fount to which only the qualified and privileged could be admitted. The teacher had his absolute choice in selecting his sishya and in deciding what and how he would teach. A pupil had to win his guru's favour and grace in order to obtain the knowledge he sought<sup>42</sup>. Hence the relationship was established only with the disciple who was ready for discipleship. In Vedic literature we find that certain qualities were demanded of a disciple. First of all he had to be humble, simple, hard-working, patient etc.,<sup>43</sup>. The whole atmosphere of the *gurukul* was conducive to developing these qualities. A person should die to his vanity, to his jealousy, to his envy, if he wanted to commune with Reality. In the Upanishadic age the acharya or guru used to chose the sishya only after testing candidates for the required qualities, for example in the Katha Upanishad only after testing Naciketas with many enticements. Death imparts true knowledge to Naciketas. In the Prasna Upanishad Pippalada says to Sukesha and other seekers who were in search of the highest Brahma, "Dwell with me a year more with austerity (*tapas*) chastity (*brahmacharya*) and faith (*sraddha*). Then ask what questions you will. If we know, we will tell you"<sup>44</sup>. True knowledge was refused to the unworthy. The deity of sacred knowledge approached a Brahmana and said to him: "Preserve me; I am thy treasure, reveal me not to a scorner, nor to a wicked man, nor to one of uncontrolled passions. Thus I shall be strong. ... Reveal me to him as to keeper of thy gem, O Brahmana, whom thou shall know to be pure, attentive, possessed of good memory and chaste, who will not grieve thee nor revile thee"<sup>45</sup>. The laws of Manu state "sacred knowledge must not be sown just as good

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41. Cfr. Swami Vivekanada Vol. VI p. 471.

42. Cfr. Nirukta 2/ 1-4, Laws 2 Mannu II 114-115.

43. Cfr. Nirukta 2/3; 2/4.

44. Prasna Upanished 1/1-2

45. Cfr. *The Institutes of Vishnu*, Chap. 29, Nos. 9 & 10, Max Muller, Vol. VII p. 122.



seed must not be thrown on barren land"<sup>46</sup>. All this reminds one of our Lord's saying "Do not cast pearls before swine". Swami Vivekananda sums up the qualities of the disciple: "The one thing necessary is to be stripped of our vanities, the sense that we possess any spiritual wisdom, and to surrender ourselves completely to the guidance of our guru. The guru only knows what will lead us towards perfection. We are quite blind to it. We do not know anything. This sort of humility will open the door of our heart to spiritual truths. Truths will never come into our minds so long as there remains the faintest shadow of *ahankara* (egotism). All of you should try to root out this divine from your heart. Complete self surrender is the only way to spiritual illumination"<sup>47</sup>. Swami Abhishktanada concludes, "No one should use this word (guru) let alone dare to call some one his guru, if he does not himself have the heart and soul of a disciple"<sup>48</sup>. Only if one is capable of discerning the ability of a disciple and what suits him he can be a guru. This demands a great sense of openness to the spirit. "He alone can receive it who is inwardly attuned to his guru and whose spirit is so free that truth can possess him without meeting any obstacles"<sup>49</sup>. Hindu tradition stresses the need for him who strives for *brahma vidya* to purify himself and dive deep within. The truth is hidden in the depths of the heart. The only real guru is the one who directs attention to the heart. The only real disciple is the one who listens within"<sup>50</sup>. "This applies all the more rigorously when guru and disciple do not belong to the same spiritual tradition. Until one aims at essentials alone, one will very likely be put off by the forms and will consequently miss the message of the spirit"<sup>51</sup>.

### Reflections on the guru

Our aim is to reflect on our faith in Christ and His Church and see in what way the Guru-Sishya relationship would help

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46. Laws of Manu II No. 112, Max Muller, Vol. XXV p. 51

47. Swami Vivekananda Vol. V. p. 257.

48. Abhishiktananda *Guru and Disciple* p. 28.

49. Ibid p. 28.

50. Ibid p. 29.

51. Ibid p. 29.



in realizing it in the Indian context. In India even now when a guru's life conforms to his vocation and when to the knowledge of "scriptures" he joins spiritual experience, people flock to him to have his darshan, to prostrate themselves at his feet and have from him the secret of spiritual life and the way which leads to God. Even today in the context of Hindu society, the guru is still an essential and indispensable part of it. He renders the highest and noblest service to the society provided he fulfils his role. The Religious history of India shows that Indian religions have always developed around a religious person. It was around him that the community grew.

At present a debate is going on all over the world on the function of authority in the Church. All over the world theologians have questioned the concept of authority that has crept in the Church from the secular pattern. "One could suspect an effort to substitute for the power of love the power of domination, and one is reminded of the kings and magnates of the Gentiles"<sup>52</sup>. "A Person intoxicated with power attributes its merits to himself just like the victorious Assyrians"<sup>53</sup>. The Church has been modelled on the State, and the pastoral ministry too on the administrative machinery of the State. Bishops have taken the title of king and princes. The Church in India has also inherited this tradition. One find it difficult to understand how a Bishop, in the context of Our Lord's explicit teaching, could ever be called prince or have signs and paraphernalia of a prince (see Mt. 20 : 25-28).

In the context of the Indian tradition of guru-sishya, and in the Indian situation of the primacy of the spirit and spiritual values, there is urgent need for spiritual authority to be authentic and according to the Spirit of God. In the Indian Church authority has become too much institutionalized; administrative structures have hardened round it and thus have overshadowed the Spirit.

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52. Mckenzie, *Power and Wisdom* The Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee p, 186.

53. Ibid p. 186.



Abbe Monchanin rightly asks "will he (Hindu) ask for spiritual nourishment unless he recognises in the leaders of the Church, true Gurus, masters of spiritual life? Technical ability will count little for him, so too will knowledge or friendship. No one will be recognized as a guru, as authorized to teach the way of God, unless he be humble.... peaceable in his ways, able to remain for long periods absorbed in the presence of God"<sup>54</sup>.

The Church lacks the unction of the Spirit and of personal relationship and on both counts it cannot be credible in the context of Indian religious traditions.

If we are really to respond to the urging of the Spirit in the Church in India today, we should reflect much more deeply and extensively than we have done in the past on the way the meaning of authority was conceived in the Indian tradition. As Swami Abishiktananda say "She (Church) has to answer the challenge of interiority and spiritual depth put to her by Hinduism - by the Spirit, as we would confidently affirm, through Hinduism"<sup>55</sup>. This demands that in obedience to the Spirit the Church in India should be ready to change her present external form and certain structures.

### Unction of the Spirit

The source of all authority is the Spirit. Successful leadership is the work of the Spirit and not the work of man. Authority is based on the openness of the guru to the Spirit - the intensity of being possessed by the Spirit should be the criterion for judging its credibility. Hence the source is not the individual's will flowing from his 'ego' "aham" or I. Aham is negated; but 'Thou' is realized. The guru should empty himself of his self, and only thus can he be open to the Spirit. He should be able to say with St. Paul, "I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me", Gal. 2/20. or with John the Baptist "He must increase and I must decrease". The Indian concept of guru very strongly insists on eliminating any selfish

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54. Cfr. Clergy Monthly Mission Supplement 1963 p. 290.

55. Abhishiktananda *Towards the Renewal of the Indian Church* p. 11.



motives or vested interests. In a detached person the freedom of the spirit is transparent. He witnesses to the utter freedom of the Spirit. In this situation the Guru being open and sensitive to the Holy Spirit knows what is God's will for him and for his disciples. It is this faith in the guru that makes a disciple surrender himself to him. The uninitiated cannot understand what is God's will towards him, Whenever a disciple surrenders to the guru he surrenders to the Spirit. Hence Indian tradition prescribes 'Give your guru the honour due to God'<sup>56</sup>. But the guru, for his part, is forbidden to seek any external praise or publicity. Any craving for publicity is against the basic idea of the guru.

The Indian concept of guru insists on the credibility of the authority. Only to the guru who is credible, by his conduct, is total surrender due. The sign of being possessed by the Spirit is renunciation of all attachment. A person in authority should be without any pretensions, and kind, friendly. There should be, in everything, gentleness about him. Joy and peace and love should be the characteristics of a person who has the freedom of the Spirit, cf. Gal: 5/18-22. Pomp and show are alien to the idea of true guru. It is this call to authenticity which prompted the All-India Seminar at Bangalore to pass the resolution, quoted elsewhere in this issue<sup>57</sup>.

A true guru cannot make external show the basis of his authority. He attributes the merits of his authority not to himself but to the Spirit. This does not displace the human power of intelligence and will, but these are helpless without the Spirit.

Since the Guru is led by it, his values, attitudes, interests and outlook are in accordance with it. "To live the life of the Spirit is to think the thought of the Spirit"<sup>58</sup>. Hence docility to the spirit and discernment by its power should be the characteristics of authority. Evidence of docility to the Spirit is found in the unpredictable ways in which the guru acts and commands his disciple. The Spirit's movements are unpredictable and cannot be

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56. Kushwant Singh C/r cit.

57. Cf. this issue of *Jeevadhara*, p. 328.

58. Rom 8/5.



judged according to human prudence. Submission to the spirit makes the guru discern different charisms and the diverse ways in which the disciples are led to the 'Sat' Guru. He will not treat all disciples alike and in a uniform way. A police mentality of keeping external law and order is alien to this concept. Today's great controversy regarding structures and charisms in the church will find a solution if we give primacy to the Spirit in the concept of authority.

A guru is expected to have an experience of God. In Vedic time; the authority of the guru was respected because the 'sage had a direct vision of the nature of piety'.<sup>59</sup> Swami Sivananda says "mere study of books cannot make one a guru. One who has studied the Vedas and who has direct knowledge of Atman through anubhava can be enrolled guru"<sup>60</sup>. Our Lord wants the gurus of his Church to be such men. He is not merely a giver of intellectual knowledge but a transmitter of an experience of the Risen Christ which has been handed down to him through the Apostolic succession. He has the task of not only repeating and explaining but of leading the disciple upto the discovery of the inner meaning of Christ and to the same experience within his own heart. Only a "realized" man, somebody who teaches what he knows and leads where himself is can be a guru. A Christian guru being a man with God - experience "will allow the Christ whom he has experienced and accepted in his own life to communicate himself to all who enter into contact with Him through the gift of the Spirit."<sup>61</sup> (Cf. Nagapur Declaration No. 40). Hence the Inner Spirit is the inner 'Guru' to whom every true Christian guru should be able to lead his disciple.

### Obedience

Obedience means listening to the Spirit who speaks to the disciple through the guru. "The Guru must be a man who has known, has actually realized, the Divine Truth."<sup>62</sup> All authority

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59. G. K. Bhat 'Teacher-Pupil Relation Vedic view' Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bombay Vol. 45-46 1970 p. 13.

60. Divine Life Society 1966 p. 4.

61. Declaration on Evangelization. Nagpur No. 40.

c/r. Service and Salvation, Edited by J. Pathrapankal p. 12.

62. Swami Vivekananda Vol. VIII p. 115.



should be totally submissive to the Holy Spirit. He should be a "God-Possessed individual who plants the seed of faith in men," a seed which when it blossoms, will liberate men from greed, hate and fear.<sup>63</sup> "The disciple looks upon him as God himself and trusts him, reveres him, obeys him, follows him unquestioningly. This is the relationship between the guru and the disciple".<sup>64</sup> The concept of being possessed by the Divine Spirit is essential to the exercise of authority. In this situation, obedience becomes an act of faith in God rather than in an individual. In this contact the total surrender which a disciple makes to the guru, becomes a surrender to God. It is the experience of Atman that gives credibility to the demand of obedience. Without this experience, which cannot be had unless one is holy, there is no credibility in the Indian context. The Indian situation should remind those in authority that it is on nothing human, either social, disciplinary, or intellectual, that authority stands but only on one's own experience of the Spirit. "In many ministers of the Church, teaching or practising is reduced very often to the repetition of an elementary catechism, at its best, of the word and the stories of the Bible. One can sincerely wonder whether such preaching is coming from a genuine experience of the Spirit.... In the Hindu tradition, the words, even of the Vedas are not an end; they are only means of realization. The guru has the task not only of repeating and explaining them, but of leading the disciple up to the discovery of their inner meaning and to this same experience within his own heart, as first felt by the rishies who heard them. Hence only the 'realized, man, somebody who teaches what he knows and leads where he himself is, can be a guru'.<sup>65</sup>

### **The bishop and his flock**

The authority of the bishop over his flock could be exercised as that of a real guru over his sishyas. In the existing context of power structures, the relationship of Christians with their Bishop through the 'unction' of personal relationship has been lost. He is seen as authoritarian and as one who manipu-

63. Cfr. Kushwant Singh. Illustrated weekly March 18, 1973.

64. Swami Vivekananda Vol. VII p. 117.

65. Abhishikatananda Op. Cit p. 12.



lates them. They do not see their Bishop as a truly spiritual leader (guru) but as an administrator who has a sacred character. In this train of reflection there is no attempt to dissociate the Church of the Spirit from the structured Church. The dogmatic Constitution on the Church (para 8) clearly states: "They form one interlocked reality which is comprised of a divine and human element."<sup>66</sup> The plea is made here that all the structures should be at the service of the Spirit. Because of the emphasis on institution the Church is not seen as a religious reality. The Bishop is not seen as mediating the truth. The Bishop is not seen as the door or the gate that one passes through to attain God - the Truth, and Life. Christ meant that he should be continued in the relationship of guru and disciple. The Bishop is one on whom spiritual power has descended through *guru parampara* or an unbroken chain of discipleship. The Bishop receives his mandate and authority from Christ through apostolic succession. Moreover in the guru concept there is no way to the attainment of knowledge unless it is transmitted through the apostolic succession of disciple to disciple: unless it comes through the mercy of the guru and direct from his mouth.<sup>67</sup> The whole approach could be considered as the passing on of a spiritual tradition given by Christ to the people through the Bishop. "The living secrets must be handed down from guru to disciples, much more so in religion".<sup>68</sup> The bishop should be regarded as the embodiment of Christ: "The living guru is believed to be the embodiment of the founder deity, and he is thus the latest in the line of succession. The leaders of all sects are thus said to be initiated either by the sectarian God during a theophany or by another leader."<sup>69</sup>

The bishop's role should be that of a vehicle of a mighty current of spirituality. In this concept the exercise of *magisterium* will also be conceived as the experience of the Spirit. "The Spirit leads her (the Church) from within, He recalls to her memory the words of Christ, and makes her realize their truth in an ever-new way. Through his shining presence he enables her to deal with

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66. Cfr. Documents of Vatican II Abbot 1966 p. 22.

67. Swami Vivekananda Vol. IV p. 431.

68. Ibid p. 288.

69. Benjamin Walker 'Hindu World' Vol. I p. 419.



all problems put to her on all planes by the new circumstances of time" (Abhishiktananda, *Renewal of the Church* p. 13). The Spirit gives the guru freedom to see the truth and courage to express it. "Where the spirit is there is liberty" (II Cor 3. 17).

Jesus wanted his guru to be his instruments. Hence he warned them "you must not be called 'Teacher for you have only one Teacher' Mt. 23/8. The bishop should be a person who will lead the flock to the 'sat' guru i. e. Christ who alone is the teacher. "The 'sat' guru is the master of truth preeminently the real and true teacher, the good master of the Gospel (Mark 10/7). He alone introduces others to the real, to sat. He alone communicates to his disciples his own spirit, his words are spirit and life and all seeds which bring forth fruit in the hearts of those who receive them with faith and love (Lk 8/15) only. He can speak of Being, sat and lead men to it who himself dwells in the bosom of the Father, The origin and source of all that is"<sup>70</sup>. The guru is visible form, the one who can show the way.

### The guru's sacramental relationship to the sishyas

"Through the Church in India, Christ Himself, the light of all nations," is present among us to continue His mission of drawing all men and the whole of creation back to the Father. Hence she must stand for all the people of India as an intelligible "sacrament and sign of intimate union with God." (*Constitution on the Church* I.<sup>71</sup> Christ unfolded God's presence. In him we find God's life, light and love realized in a spatio - temporal context. He was the perfect sacrament of God - a symbol which not only signified the life, light and love of God, but effected and communicated them while symbolizing them. This sacramentality of Christ is continued in the Church and in His apostles - the Bishops. Christ not merely is a guru who lived once with his disciples but an inner Guru who continues to dwell with us and communicate through His apostles - the bishops. Hence the bishop should be the sacramental realization of Christ's life, light and love for those who come in contact with him.

70. Abhishiktananda. 'Seccidenanda' p. 202.

71. Cfr. All India Seminar-Dp. Cit p. 249,



It is worth while exploring not only how the guru's life is the witness of God's presence, but how the relationship with worthy disciples becomes a sacramental symbol. The concept of the guru's 'darshan' may contribute much to our understanding this symbol. From where does the power of the darshan of the real guru come to transform the disciple who is ready for it? Jesu's mere look at Zaccheus or St. Peter or Mary Magdalene transformed them from sinner into saints. 'Virtues' went out of Him. All those who came in sincere contact with Christ – were transformed. Cannot the darshan of a Bishop transform the sishya? Should not the darshan of a guru bring joy and peace to the disciple? As S. K. Wankhede says "A revolution which cannot be brought about by thousands of scholars can be accomplished by a Guru"<sup>72</sup>. Describing Shri. Gyananandas's darshan to his devotees Swami Abhishiktananda writes: "One saw faith, love and complete confidence in this man who had become for them (his followers) nothing less than an epiphany of the Invisible Presence. The outward manifestation to their human eyes of the grace and love of the Lord who dwells undivided both in the highest heavens and in the deepest depth of the heart"<sup>73</sup>. "An ineffable communication had been established between the master and himself (*Vanya*) in the depths of the one as of the other." Dr. Bhagawathi Prasad Singh gives a few instances of the effect on a Sishya of a meeting with his guru<sup>74</sup>. This is exactly the mystery of 'guru' which should be realized in a bishop.

### The sense of spiritual paternity

Interpersonal relationship between guru and sishya i.e. a Bishop and the Faithful can be understood by the way in which Our Lord dealt and treated His disciples. In particular St. Paul who understood his role as guru, illustrates clearly the relationship between the bishop and his flock. His words to the Galatians (cf. 4/19) "My dear children! Once again just like a mother in

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72. Kushwant Singh Illustrated weekly March 18, 73 p. 17.

73. Abhishiktananda "Guru and Disciple" p. 26.

74. C/r Dr. Bhagwati Prasad Singh "Mauishi Kilokyatra" Vishwavidyalaya Prakashan Varanasi 1968 p. 41.



childbirth, I feel the same kind of pain for you, until Christ's nature is formed in you." This fits in well to the concept of the guru - sishya relationship. St. Paul really considers himself the instrument of the giving of new life, new birth to his disciples. He claims spiritual paternity over them and his whole relationship and attitudes are based on this. If a bishop is viewed as real father by the Faithful, this will give a real basis to the credibility of his authority and the attitudes between them will change'. The bishop will not be regarded as the one who occupies a throne or as head of an institution but a father who loves his children.

### **The gurukula System of exercising authority in our Seminaries**

There is much scope to reflect on the guru - sishya relationship on the matter of priestly training in India. In this relationship freedom and initiative are given to the members and at the same the credibility of the authority is also sufficiently emphasized. As Jesus dealt with his Apostles, and as they advanced in this relationship and in knowledge, so Acharya Kulapati dealt with his followers. In this relationship it is that Rector and other professors should be 'credible'. They should not be merely teachers of knowledge but men who are committed and who have had the experience of what they would impart. In the present context there is a particularly great demand, for having 'holy men' on the staff. The guru (The Rector and professors) should be able to discern the talents and gifts of the members. Is the Church in India prepared and willing to have real gurus according to the adopted gurukula system?

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# Authority in the Hindu Scriptures

In this age of freedom and personality-fulfilment there is a great deal of opposition to obedience, to authority however legitimate, and subjection to any external power is considered slavery. But life in society is impossible without a minimum of discipline, especially in the Church which is a sacral community in which there are caring for each other, the sharing of spiritual goods and submission in the obedience of faith.<sup>1</sup> An examination of the Hindu scriptures in their approach to authority and obedience can be very helpful to discover the reconciliation of these two opposites in the inner conviction generated by the word.

## Authority and Power

The Aryans who settled in the Indo-Gangetic plain encountered the problem at a political level in reconciling the spiritual predominance of the Brahmins, who were the professional teachers and priests maintained by the settled agriculturalists, and the warlike chieftains of the nomadic food gatherers, who were being slowly integrated into the community. Might was right for the jungle people and there was a danger that the conquering power of the Kshatriyas would stifle the inner persuasion employed by the Brahmin. The well-established Brahmanical class that wielded the word employed a subtle strategem against the might of the sword. They had recourse to the harmony of the hearth, the union of husband wife in the family as a model of society. At home the woman was the executive arranging everything according to her taste and freedom, but man, who supplied the wherewithal had his place of honour and provided the inspiration. Instead of being imagined as two parallel forces contending for predominance they were presented as having complementary roles. In the political family the king represented the feminine principle while the priest stood for masculine authority. The Brahmin writers of the Vedas conceived the gods themselves in pairs. Agni and Indra, Mitra and Varuna, Aditi and Daksha, Brihaspati and Indra all

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1) I Pet. 5:5; Heb. 13:17



presented such combinations. Agni, Mitra Brihaspati and Brahman represented the sacerdotal principle of authority, while Indra, Varuna and Daksha stood for the executive power. Words of the RgVeda like "Into your hands, O Indra, I (Agni) commit the bolt"<sup>2</sup>, "We have laid the bolt in your hands"<sup>3</sup>, sound exactly like the investiture of kings in the Middle Ages by the priestly authority of the Church. Indra is chosen by Agni the sacrificial priest<sup>4</sup>. Indra is the door and he captures more and more power<sup>5</sup>. But the priest must have precedence over the king. "To him the people of themselves pay homage in whose realm the Brahmin goes first"<sup>6</sup>. Agni tells Indra: "I in person go before thee and if you give me my share, then you shall go through me, O Indra, and perform heroic deeds"<sup>7</sup>. To the extent that kingly power abides by the counsel of the Brahmins, the ordinary people will respect the king. The Brahmanas are filled with narratives that describe the prosperity of kings who obeyed their Brahmin advisers and the disasters suffered by those who dared to cross that authority. One single Brahmin by the power of his curse was able to destroy whole armies. Soon the Brahmins absorbed all the gods and represented the *devasvah*, the deities Savitar, Agni, Soma, Brihaspati, Indra, Rudra, Mitra and Varuna, who through the priest vitalized the king. "It is these gods that quicken him (the king) and having been quickened by them he is henceforth quickened"<sup>8</sup>. Then he rules by divine right. The marriage of the Purohita to the king is referred to in Rg Veda X, 47, 1: "We have taken thee by the right hand," says the priest reproachfully to Indra referring to the latter's arrogance<sup>9</sup>. Whatever the king does unquicken by the priesthood is, as it were, not done at all<sup>10</sup>. As for the ordinary people whatever they did uninspired by the royalty and the priesthood was considered misdone.<sup>11</sup> The silent controlling authority of the Brahmin representing the deity is made manifest in the sacrificial ritual. The Brahmin Purohita, who represents the supreme Brahma

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2) RV. X, 52, 5

3) RV. II, 11, 4

4) RV. X, 124, 4; VII, 7, 5; X, 47, 1

5) RV. X, 31, 2; SB. IV, 4, 4, 1

6) RV. IV, 50, 7-9

7) RV. VIII, 100, 1

8) SB. V, 3, 3, 11. 13

9) RV. X, 47, 1

10) SB. IV, 1, 4, 3

11) AB. II, 38



presides at the sacrifice without taking any active part in the ceremonies. But his presence is indispensable. His relation to the other priestly officiants like the Hotr, Adhvaryu and Saman whose role is active and vocal is that of a Director to the Executive.

### **Purusha and Prakrti**

This relation between authority and power was based on the anthropology and psychology of the ancient Samkhya system. In man all activities were the manifestation of the sattva, rajas and tamas, reflection, action and limitation rooted in the feminine principle Prakrti. She was the root of all evolution and manifestation. But the inner essence of man was Purusha, the spiritual principle that remains unaffected as a pure witness. Prakrti needs purusha since all her activities are energised by the light reflected from him. On the other hand Purusha needs Prakrti since without the subordination and integration of Prakrti and its evolutions the detached Purusha cannot be called a self nor have self-consciousness. Hence the subordination of Prakrti to the authority of Purusha is the very inner law of her existence. Without that subordination her evolutions would not have any direction, unity or purpose. It is necessary for Purusha also since without that it will be a detached abstraction without individuality and identity and not a real human self. Hence all obedience in human life is the integration of the lower powers to the ideals and dictates of the spiritual reality of man.

### **Reason and Will**

This subordination of power and execution to authority is ultimately rooted in the interdependence of the power of the human mind. Whatever is desired by the will (kratu, Gk. Klatos)<sup>12</sup> has to be in accord with the discernment, with manas, the intellect or spirit, which is equated with Prajapati, the universal designer<sup>13</sup>.

### **The Authority of the Word**

What is fundamental in this Hindu conception of authority and obedience is in full agreement with the nature of scripture

12) AV. XIX, 52; RV. X, 129, 4

13) SB. VIII, 1, 2, 3; TS. II, 5, 11, 5; PB. XX, 14, 2; AB. V, 23; RV. X, 71, 2.



and revelation itself. The authority of scripture is not any external authority, or revealer, but the self-revealing Word. The eternal Vac with a thousand syllables resides in the highest heaven.<sup>14</sup> Three-fourths of her remains unknown to men. Only one-fourth is grasped by the sages and poets. Man has a glimpse of Vac in the names of things, in grammar, in ritual and especially in the heart of the sage. But she is really understood only by one to whom she chooses to reveal herself.<sup>15</sup> As the supreme and ultimate reality the Word is her own authority demanding the submission of all minds.

The written Word of scripture is its expression in human words by those sages who directly experienced it. This scriptural Word has, therefore, a twofold meaning. As Yaska says in the Nirukta<sup>16</sup>, on the one hand, it leads to understanding of the transcendental meaning, and on the other, to appropriate expression in action and ritual. What makes obedience to the authority of scripture really ennobling to the human mind is the experience of that transcendental reality hidden in the words. The Vedas ascribe a priority to the Word as reality. Vac, or Word, was the prototype of the later concept of Atman-Brahman.<sup>17</sup> The Rigveda repeatedly speaks of the hidden meaning of the mantras.<sup>18</sup> The words of scripture rise, as it were, from the depths of the human heart<sup>19</sup> expressing man's aspirations after realizing the divine. On the other hand the Word is transcendent and creative covering the diverse poises of the expanding consciousness, as the thousand vastnesses of the spirit manifested in a thousand ways.<sup>20</sup> Vac sweeps down from above as a tempest while putting forth all existences.<sup>21</sup> She is revealed by the Light Powers and established in the inner being as an ecstasy of delight ruling like a queen over the Light Powers.<sup>22</sup> Hence she is truly called a divine Word (Vaco daivyam).<sup>23</sup>

14) RV. I, 164, 41

16) Nirukta I, 20

18) RV. I, 164, 39; VIII, 100, 10; X, 71. 3, 4, 5; X, 114, 8

19) RV. IV, 3, 16

20) RV. X, 114, 8

21) RV. X, 125, 8

22) RV. VIII, 100, 10-11

23) RV. IV, 1, 15



This authority of the Word over the mind is not something imposed from the outside curtailing the freedom of man, but arises from the spontaneous experience of man. Only a man of insight can produce the Word through the agency of the mind.<sup>24</sup> This insight is variously described in the Veda as Yajamana (quality of aspirant)<sup>25</sup>, a divine eye<sup>26</sup>, anantam (infinite)<sup>27</sup> and brahma or vast consciousness.<sup>28</sup> It goes beyond the particular faculties of man even the mind. It is fashioned by the heart, and speeds beyond the ranges of the mind.<sup>29</sup>

Hence obedience to authority is not an abdication of one's autonomy. It is in fact the experience of one's authentic self and final goal, the perfection of one's true freedom. The seers who perceived the Word "were men who had the direct experience of the ultimate reality".<sup>30</sup> As Nirukta further states none but a seer and truly spiritual man can understand the meaning of the mantras. When the seers passed away gods gave men Reason as the seer. "Hence, whatever one speaks with reason, following the track of the Word, becomes as good as the utterance of the seer".<sup>31</sup> The seer is the man in intimate consonance with his own reason. To obey the authority of the revealed Word, is therefore, to discover the fulfilment of one's own nature.

### Agents of authority

The authority flowing from the Word is differently shared by the different agents of social and religious organization. The preeminent position of the guru, or teacher, as the wielder of authority comes from his knowledge of the Veda. First of all he has to be a man of learning constantly studying the scriptures, to be worthy of his position. A Brahmin has three births, physical birth from his parents, another by undergoing the rite of initiation and the third by accomplishment in the Vedic studies. "The Brahmins who have studied and recited sacred lore are the human gods".<sup>32</sup> The Brahmin's learning is not a matter of mere

24) RV. X, 71, 2

26) Ch. U. VIII, 12, 5

28) B. U. IV, 1, 6

30) Nirukta VII, 4; cf. I, 20

31) Nirukta XIII, 12, 13

32) SB. II, 2, 2, 6

25) Pra. U. IV, 4

27) B. U. III, 1, 9

29) RV. X, 71, 8



personal privilege. It imposed several restrictions on him regarding occupation and food, and demanded regular study, rituals and prayer, so that his life should be dedicated to the service of the people. The Gautama law-book says that a Brahmin learned in the scriptures will not be without progeny, if not from the lower part of his body, at least from his upper part, the mind, through spiritual generation. Knowledge has to be imparted by word of mouth by the guru to the disciple. Knowledge acquired from the teacher is more successful for the attainment of the goal than that got from any other source.<sup>33</sup> A teacher is indispensable for the proper acquisition of knowledge.<sup>34</sup> The *mundaka Upanishad* instructs the disciple desirous of attaining the liberating knowledge to approach "a teacher (guru) who is learned in the scriptures and established in brahman".<sup>35</sup> There is an intimate spiritual relation between the teacher and the disciple.

If the authority of the guru established a fellowship on the spiritual plane, that of the elders constituted the family community, and the king extended that harmony and unity to the whole realm. Thus the function of all the different agents of authority was to establish the human community as an integrated sacral one.

### Response to authority

The area where the Indian scriptural understanding of authority has made the greatest contribution is man's response to authority. Here the fundamental principle has been stated as "adhikaribheda", "arundhatidarsana nyaya", etc. Though all authority is centred in the absolute divine Word it has different functions and meanings with regard to different subjects and in different situations. This point has gained particular emphasis in Western thought in recent times with the development of hermeneutics under the inspiration of existentialism and phenomenology. Though divine Word is absolute and immutable it is presented to man in different stages of different psychological development internally and in varying external circumstances.

33) Ch. U. IV, 9, 3; cf. TS. II, 5, 4, 4

34) Katha. U. II, 8

35) Mund. U. I, 2, 12



The principle "adhikaribheda" states that all expressions of the word are not equally applicable or useful to everyone. To people at a certain stage of psychological development ritual and ceremonies like sacrifices and *samskaras* may be quite necessary for their appropriate grasp of spiritual truths. To certain others below that psychological level the same ritual performances may be even harmful since they may lead to superstition or magical 'abracadabra' and a mechanical subservience to material things for the attainment of selfish interests. For those above the psychological level such practice may not be spiritually useful apart from the social aspect of public celebration in common of the divine mystery. In this respect scripture itself is a time-bound particular expression of the divine and cannot be taken as absolute or final. For, as Sankara states, even scripture is only a means of leading man to the realization of the divine.<sup>36</sup> To impose ceremonies, observances and scriptural reading on all and sundry indiscriminately by mere external compulsion will defeat their very purpose and meaning.

All spiritual practices and observance have a pedagogical function. This is neatly expressed in the *arundhati darsana nyaya*. When a teacher wants to point out the star Arundhati to a disciple it is not enough for him to point to a crowd of stars and say 'there it is.' He has to point first those stars clearly discerned by the eye and say that each one of them is not Arundhati, so that by this process of elimination the disciple will spontaneously recognize the star he is looking for. Most of our worldly pursuits and spiritual quests are not intermediary steps directly leading to the final realization. Their function is to isolate the different concerns of human life and convince the aspirant that they are not ultimately relevant to the ultimate goal. This is the essence of the apophatic method which tells us what God is not rather than what he is. All authority has a transitional function in human life. Just as the function of a father's authority is not to perpetuate itself, but rather to help the son to become an adult and make the father's direction unnecessary, all human authority of law is pedagogic. It is to enable man to attain the

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36) Br. Sutra. S. Bh. 1, 1, 2.



spiritual maturity that will make all law unnecessary and bring about the freedom of the children of God in the Gospel.

### Conclusion

Thus the Hindu conception of authority is based on the infinite truth of the eternal subsistent *Vac*, the word. That word directly experienced by the sages is manifested in the word of scripture. The Brahmin who studies scripture for the service of the community wields the greatest authority in society. He makes use of authority through intellectual instruction, spiritual persuasion and the proper performance of rites and ceremonies. The parents in the family and the king in the civil society share in the same authority. But they all are merely challenges of the Word that has to be responded to by the individual according to the relative maturity of his mind and appropriate discernment of the actual situation. But the final goal of all authority is to help or the immediate realization of the Word by mind and heart, that will achieve the adult freedom of the human person. Reasoning (*tarka*) tradition (*smṛti*) and scripture (*śruti*) correspond respectively to reason, intelligence and bliss in the psyche of man.<sup>37</sup> They correspond to *manas* (mind) *manisa* (wisdom, and *hrd* (heart) of the *Rgveda*,<sup>38</sup> in their response to the eternal authority of *Vac* the divine Word.

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37) Tait. Up. III, 2-6

38) RV. I, 61, 2.



# The Nature of Authority according to modern Hindu Reformers

Ever since the bare beginnings of cultural "adaptation" which Fr. Roberto de Nobili was daring enough to start in the Indian context, when we speak of "acculturation" and "inculturation" of the Church on Indian soil,<sup>1</sup> the question of the nature and extent of authority has been a problem to be reckoned with. It demands a closer examination and deeper study now, especially since we are beginning, apparently, to move at an accelerated pace towards living and developing an Indian Christian Theology. To those of us who are accustomed and attained to the concept and practice of authority in the Church, it may be welcome and refreshing to consider what people around us, especially modern Hindu reformers, think of authority, in their own context, of course.

The concept of authority varies in different religions and creeds. In Hindu thought, in general, there is mention of authority especially of the scriptural kind. This holds good for the ancient and classical periods. Although '*Sruti* (what is heard, revealed) *Smṛti* (what is remembered, tradition) and *Anubhava* (what has been experienced, experience) have authority, all the three do not have it equally.

In Hinduism '*Sruti* is considered to be the primary authority in all matters of religious truth and practices. The reason for this primacy of *Sruti* is the belief that it is infallible because it is eternal<sup>2</sup>. The eternality of *Sruti* is based on the belief that it is independent of individual witnesses (*purusa saksin*) In

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1. Cfr. Samuel Rayan, "Flesh of India's Flesh" in *Jeevadhara* (33), May-June 1976, p.259. The entire number of *Jeevadhara* deals with this question extensively.

2. Cfr. Richard De Smet, "sruti and Divine Inspiration" in Jesuit scholars, *Religious Hinduism*, Allahabad: St Paul's publications, 1968, pp. 38-40.



other words, it is independent in its origin, independent of individuals, and hence *apauruseya*. All other words originate in man and hence are dependent on man (*pauruseya*). Since man is limited, he is also fallible and those words originating from him are also fallible. In contrast, *Sruti*; which is independent of individuals is infallible, because unoriginated in time and hence eternal. Infallibility comes from its eternality and independence of man, and this directly paves the way for its primacy also.

On the other hand, *Smriti*, and *anubhava* originate, in a sense, from the individual witness as different expressions of his own personal experience of an event or reality. Since they are intrinsically connected with the individual witness who is limited and fallible, the authority attributed to them, *smriti* and *anubhava*, is also limited and imperfect. In other words it cannot be final.

Thus *Smriti* and *anubhava* are subordinate to *Sruti*. They become sources of authority in so far as they are in tune with *Sruti*, the primary and final source of authority<sup>3</sup>.

It is this unparalleled primacy of the authority of *Sruti* that influenced authors of different systems and various interpretations to trace these back to *Sruti* itself, thus demonstrating that they are authoritative and authentic since they are in conformity with *Sruti*. This is especially true of the authors of the classical systems and even of the medieval scholastic thinkers.

The ancient and classical periods were periods of development, philosophical elucidation and doctrinal consolidation. The period between the 12th and the 17th centuries was a long winter as far as Hinduism is concerned<sup>4</sup>. The onslaught of the Islam and other religious traditions put it on the defensive, and there were no incentives for its revival and growth. Its religious, cultural and social supremacy became a thing of the past.

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3. Cfr. R. H. S. Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1969, pp. 228-30.

4. Cfr. Sisikumar Mitra, *Resurgent India*, Bombay: Allied Publishers Private Ltd., 1963, pp. 45-46.



The winter was to pass however long it may have been. A reawakening, a new sunshine, was heralded on the horizon with the advent of modern reformers. There were a number of them, but for the sake of brevity and clarity it will be enough to select one or two of them. Raja Rammohan Roy was the pioneer of Hindu Reform Movements and Dr. Radhakrishnan, a product and representative of them.

The life of Rammohan Roy, falls into three phases: his early years, his life as a reformer and his final years<sup>5</sup>. In his early years, as a devout Vaishnavite Brahmin, he held in great esteem his own and the family's religious practices and traditions, and also was a firm believer in the truth of the Scriptures<sup>6</sup>.

However, his contact with Islam and Christianity began to make a considerable change in his outlook on his own religious practices and also on the sacred books<sup>7</sup>. His encounter with the strict monotheism of Islam and Christianity helped him to rediscover the monotheistic strain of thought in the Hindu scriptures. The early beginnings of this discovery were marked by strong reactions against some of the Hindu religious tenets and practices, held sacred on the authority of 'scriptures'<sup>8</sup>. In this early period he was also influenced strongly by the rationalistic thought of some European philosophers<sup>9</sup>. It created a strong impression on him and he became convinced that all tenets were to be put to the test of rational verification and only those which could stand it were to be accepted as truth<sup>10</sup>. Had he pushed this argument to its conclusion he would not have been able to accord much authority to the Hindu Scriptures.

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5. For a detailed appreciation of Raja Rammohan Roy's life and work, Cfr. S. D. Collet, *The Life and Letters of Rammohan Roy*, Calcutta: Sadharana Brahmo Samaj, 1952.

6. Cfr. Collet, *Life and Letters*, p. 5.

7. Cfr. Iqbal Sing, *Rammohan Roy*, Vol. I, London: Asia Publishing House, 1953, pp. 19-20.

8. Cfr. Rammohan Roy's letter in Collet, *Life and Letters*, p. 497.

9. Cfr. Iqbal Singh, *Rammohan Roy*, pp. 118-19.

10. Cfr. U. N. Ball, *Rammohan Roy - A study of his Life, Works and Thought*, Calcutta: U. Ray and Sons, 1933, pp. 23-28.



However, mature thought and contact with other religions helped to bring about some changes in his outlook, although he would strongly argue for a religion which is both rational and supernatural. His study of other religions like Islam and Christianity opened his mind to the authority which they also accorded to their own Scriptures. It also showed him some of the principles of social and moral behaviour underlying those religions. Thus for example, Rammohan was highly impressed by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, especially these moral principles and codes of conduct which he thought were the best guide for peace and happiness<sup>11</sup>. He also seems to have felt that the reasons for the prosperity, social coherence and development of the Christian nations of Europe were to be found in the teachings of Jesus, as explained in the four Gospels and followed by Christians. The primacy of authority and the pride of place which Christians gave their Scriptures, probably softened his almost rationalistic early stand, and led to his acceptance of them and their authority.

This does not mean that he was ready to accept blindly whatever the Scriptures contained. He was of the opinion that only those things which were intelligible and, could be rationally explained should be taken as objects of belief. That is one of the reasons why he dismissed a number of exaggerated religious practices, which were abhorrent to civilized minds and sensitive hearts. His extensive study of the Hindu Scriptures, really brought before his acute mind, the variety of teachings and traditions followed by the people in general, ranging from Tantric rituals, puranas and epics to the Upanishads and the Vedas. It is important to note that when Rammohan decided to spread the important and essential scriptural tenets of Hinduism, he made a selection of the scriptural books. In this choice, he was careful enough to select only the Upanishads, the Brahma Sutra and the

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11. In 1820, Rammohan Roy published a book called 'The Precepts of Jesus, the guide to peace and happiness, extracted from the books of the New Testament, ascribed to the four evangelists, with translations into Sanskrit and Bengali. Cfr. Nag and Burman (eds.), *English works of Rammohan Roy*, Part V, Calcutta: Sadharana Brahmo Samaj, 1948.



Bhagavad Gita which were all traditionally accepted by the Hindus as authentic<sup>12</sup>.

An analysis of this factor reveals, to some extent, his attitude to the authority of scriptures, and the kind of scriptural writing to which he was ready to accord authority. Here one cannot, of course, forget the fact that Hinduism does not have an official teaching authority as in the Catholic Church, whose decisions on things pertaining to faith and morals would be definitive and hence binding in conscience, under certain circumstances. Still, they too have a general a common understanding as to which parts of the Scriptures are to be considered authentic and authoritative. Within that framework, Rammohan went a step forward, by making a selection of the Scriptures themselves and interpreting them in a way that suited his purpose.

Lofty in ideals and liberal in thought he was not able to confine himself to the traditional interpretations of the Bhrahmin pandits. He felt that these were rigid and stereotyped and served only the selfish aspirations of the priestly class and not the emancipation and development of the average man. Probably without proclaiming it, he was in fact making use of a principle which was to be increasingly used by later reformers. The interpretation of a given passage or teaching in the scriptures had to take into consideration the framework and historical conditions not only of the generation that articulated the teaching, but also that of the generation to whom it is interpreted. In other words Rammohan Roy was applying a principle, a principle of no return to the old and rigid ways of interpreting the Scriptures, and introducing a new method namely focusing on man and his concrete problems here and now. All the same, one can say that he respected the authority of the Scriptures, while at the same time taking a certain liberty in interpreting them<sup>13</sup>.

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12. He translated mainly the Vedanta Sutra, the Kena, Isa, Katha, Mundaka and Mandukya Upanishads. Cfr. Collet, *Life and Letters*, p. 63 ff.

13. This has been adequately proved from the extensive prefaces which he wrote to his traslations of the Upanishads and by his controversy against the champions of orthodoxy. These he later Published with the titles, "A Defence of Hindu Theism" and "A second defence of the monotheistical system of the Vedas". Cfr. U. N. Ball, *Rammohan Roy*, p. 57.



Although Rammohan Roy gave himself a free hand in interpreting the sacred texts, he acknowledged the authority of the Scriptures. However, when Rebendranath Tagore succeeded as president of the Brahmo Samaj, he commissioned a group of scholars to do research into their revelatory nature. They came to the conclusion that they were not revealed texts in the strict sense. That led to a split in the Samaj itself in to two parties, namely the one prone to be more liberal and the other more traditional.

This period may be regarded as a parenthesis, in the history of Hindu religious reform, for those who came afterwards, though they spoke in liberal and modern terms, do not seem to have altogether denied the authority of the Scriptures, neither did Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda who, all the same cannot be regarded as champions of orthodoxy and traditionalism. It is true that Swami Vivekananda was almost an agnostic as a young student in Calcutta; Tagore's writings certainly reveal the humanist in him; but they do not for a moment, deny set the Hindu sacred writings at naught.

Coming to more recent times, we have Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, probably the greatest interpreter of Hinduism in modern times. As Marlow says, he has a unique viewpoint in that he is steeped in Western as well as Eastern philosophy and has lived in the West as a scholar and man of affairs. Thus his views and convictions have a centrality and an authority denied to many other Indian writers of modern times<sup>14</sup>.

According to Radhakrishnan, religion in India is not dogmatic. It is a rational synthesis which goes on gathering into itself new conceptions as philosophy progresses. It is experimental and provisional in its nature, attempting to keep pace with the progress of thought. The common criticism that "Indian thought by its emphasis on intellect, puts philosophy in the place of religion, itself is considered to bring out the rational character of religion in India. And whenever it tended to crystallise itself into a fixed creed, there were set up spiritual revivals and phi-

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14. Cfr. A. N. Marlow, (ed.), *Radhakrishnan, An Anthology*, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1952, pp. 3-5.



losophic reactions which threw beliefs into the crucible of criticism, vindicated the true and combated the false"<sup>15</sup>. These ideas voiced as far back as the early 20's of the century were held by him even in later years. This very passage probably discloses some of his fundamental tenets on the authority of scriptures.

This does not mean that there is no core in the scriptures which is revealed and hence authoritative. Radhakrishnan himself agrees that the truths revealed to the seers are not mere reports of introspection which are purely subjective. According to him, the inspired sages proclaim that the knowledge they communicate is not what they discover for themselves. It is, on the contrary, revealed to them without their effort. It is conceded that this knowledge is an experience of the seer; but it is an experience of an independent reality which impinges on his consciousness. There is the impact of the real on the spirit of the experiencer. That is why it is called a direct disclosure — a revelation — of the divine. Thus the inspired, disclosed, revealed matter which is *apauruseya* has credibility in it and hence has authority beyond the human, and hence man has to accept it<sup>16</sup>.

However, speaking of this experience of the divine, Radhakrishnan says that it is, to a certain extent, conditioned by the experiencer. He does not deny the fact that it is an immediate experience<sup>17</sup>. Still, when the moment of divine experience is over, the subject begins to reflect on the experience and tries to make intellectual distinctions in the 'undifferentiated whole' — the experience. Here, of course, intellectual categories come into play and therefore, the understanding of the experience would be conditioned by the concepts and thought forms that the subject is used to. There is still another barrier to be crossed. If the experiencer wants to communicate his experience intelligibly to an

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15. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1923, p. 26; *The Hindu View of Life*, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1927, pp. 16-19.

16. Cfr. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanishads*, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1953, pp. 22-23.

17. Cfr. Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of Life*, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1932, p. 95.



audience, he will necessarily have to put it in concepts and terms that can be understood by the audience. In other words he has to adapt the content of the experience to his listeners which is once again a conditioning of the experience – ‘revelation’<sup>18</sup>:

It is important to note that this double conditioning of the experience, of ‘revelation’ of the ‘Word of God’ is an integral part of revelation itself. It follows that the God-experience, as understood by Radhakishnan is, therefore, humbly-conditioned. And Radhakishnan finds this to be not an inhibitive or negative factor but a saving one as far as both revelation and man himself are concerned. For, as he thinks, these revealed truths are to be understood by man in concrete circumstances. Therefore, he would argue that each generation has the right to interpret the content of revelation, according to its experiences of life, its thought-forms and ideas that condition its thinking.<sup>19</sup> Thus an 8th century interpretation of the experience of the divine need not necessarily coincide with an interpretation of the same in the twentieth or twenty first century. In other words the human role and the human element in an experience of the divine, a revelation, makes it possible that the same scriptural passage is interpreted and understood by different generations in different ways without, at the same time, any diminution of the authority of the Scriptures.

This leads us to the question of the role and authority of experience. Here we may have to make distinction between the experiences of the seers of old and those of other holy men coming after them. The seers of old remain a source of experience and an example to later generations. However, the experiences of the old remain almost a norm to which all others are related, and analogously conform. They remain normative and in that sense authoritative. Those of later generations, on the contrary, do not seem—

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18. Cfr. *Ibid* pp. 94-95.

19. Radhakrishnan wrote: “Theory, speculation, dogma change from time to time as the facts become better understood. Their value is acquired from their adequacy to experience. When forms dissolve, and the interpretations are doubted, it is a call to get back to the experience itself and reformulate its content in more suitable terms” *Ibid*. p. 90.



to have this generally normative role. They are an experience of the divine at a given moment in a later period and are normative for those who receive them. Their content may be more developed or better articulated but they too are somehow contained in the experiences of the seers of old. That is also why there are, in a sense, only ever new commentaries on the Hindu Scriptures and not new forms of the Hindu religion. The experiences of later generations are valid only for those who accept them whereas the earliest experiences still command authority and demand adherence. This, in a way, guarantees the permanence and continuity of the Hindu religion, not in a static and stagnant state but dynamically and progressively. Whereas it holds on to the principal tenets of the older generations it is ready to get out of the confines of history and geography and is able to develop a system of religion that is 'immanent and transcendent' at the same time—the religion of the Spirit that permeates all religions and at the same time transcends them.<sup>20</sup>

Here we see the relationship between the three sources of authority namely *Sruti*, *Smriti* and *anubhava*. Each has its own authority, but at the same time the three are related in a hierarchical order. The three taken together gives Hinduism a coherent system of authority, which has its basis in the divine experiences of the early seers, but opens up and develops through tradition and finally blossoms in the divine experience of the individual here and now. Thus although the starting-point and 'norm' of all experiences are still the divine experiences of the early seers, the authority of these experiences is not 'dogmatic', it is, on the contrary, an open-ended authority, in the sense that it is ready to take into account the concrete experiential factors of the man of today and those that constitute his daily life. This, in a way, gives the Hindu, an authority which is flexible and rational, paving the way for an active and dynamic tradition, that can accept and assimilate modern trends of philosophy, religion and the secular sciences. Once again Hinduism remains the ever-old perennial wisdom—*sanatana dharma*—capable of renewing itself, of accepting something from other traditions as

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20. Cfr. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940, pp. 337–39.



well as offering itself to them and preserving its claim to be ever tolerant.

The concept of authority in Hinduism has come a long way from the ancient and classical periods to that of modern reforms. This transformation may be called a change from an anthropocentrism to a deep theo-centrism and again to a new anthropocentrism. Although this proposition itself may be disputed, an analysis of the three main stages in the development of Hinduism seems to bear eloquent witness to its truth. The anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism of the early period gave way to a highly spiritual and Absolute-centred theology and spirituality. It is however, to the credit of the classical authors and celebrated commentators, that even at the height of their Absolute-centred quest for the Real, they emphasized that this Absolute was to be found not "up there" or "out here" but in the interior of the human individual, thus safeguarding the primacy both of the divine and the human. But it is to be noted that some of the classical commentators like Samkara seem to have sacrificed the human for the sake of safeguarding the Absolute sacrificed the reality of the human and this-worldly for the sake of the divine and the other-worldly. But there are modern authors who dispute this way of understanding or misunderstanding the classical authors.

The advent of modern reformers was a corrective to this tendency. The so-called other-worldly approach to God and religion was responsible, to a great extent, for the degeneration of Hinduism between the 13th and 17th centuries A. D. Rituals and traditions were fostered without attention to their inner meaning and symbolism. Human life and the development of society became a prey to the extremes of ritualism. The Reformers had in mind the creation of a healthy society where religion would serve man for his fulfilment and integral liberation. In the development of their thought on the sources and authority of religion, they naturally gave importance to the problems of man and society and interpreted the sources in such a way as to answer this need. They did not think that this interpretation was in any way in conflict with the fundamental tenets of their Scriptures. They themselves, in a way, re-discovered the anthropo-



centric strain of thought deeply embedded in their religion, and tried to cultivate and foster it through their writings. In this work they were influenced by many external factors. However, the merit of rediscovering the hidden values of Hindu thought and the Hindu religion goes to the Reformers. Thus one might say that thanks to them, the authority of the Scriptures, tradition and experience received a new balance, which keeps them in coherent unison, while at the same time providing creative minds with further opportunities of remaining open to new thinking and development and keeping pace with a progressing humanity. This open-ended approach to authority keeps Hinduism less dogmatic and more life-oriented, with its roots in heaven, and its branches spreading on earth.

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## DISCUSSION FORUM

Already in 1972 we opened a column in *Jeevadhara* entitled "Discussion Forum" and it was stated then that the continuance of this new feature would depend entirely on the response it met with from our readers. The response hitherto has not been very encouraging.

The Christian Church is today in a transition and in the birth-pangs of renewal. Christians here, in India, are becoming more and more conscious and ever prouder of their national heritage and ancient culture. The specific purpose of *Jeevadhara* is to contribute towards the development of a theology and praxis in the Indian way of life and thought. It calls for deep thinking and fresh discussion.

We have no dearth of theologians and theological writings. But it is doubtful if there is sufficient understanding and discussion among the theologians and a critical evaluation of writings. *Jeevadhara* has been trying to promote the habit of theological reflection and arouse interest in theological studies and discussion of them. "Discussion Forum" is specifically meant for this purpose.

As a rule only experts are invited to contribute to *Jeevadhara* and as such they have full freedom to express their views. Still there can be differences of opinion. It is no use criticizing the contributors in private only because they do not go the traditional way. We need to map out a new path. Readers are welcome to make their comments in *Jeevadhara*, provided they have solid arguments in support of their positions.

General Editor



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# Editorial

The modern age for which religion is, in the words of Whitehead, what one does with one's solitude, is ill-equipped to understand the phenomenon of religious feasts and celebrations that characterized all major traditions of the world. They agree more with Durkheim in his insistence that religion is an eminently collective thing. As an integrating and reconciling dynamism religion brings man into communion with the whole of nature and into fellowship with other men, and opens him to the saving grace of God. In expressing this integrative aspect of religion feasts and celebrations have an important role to play. They express the sacredness of certain times which can be noted by observation of the heavens. The development of mathematics was capable of integrating the information so gained into a coherent whole. Thus in India and in China astronomy made possible the calendar, and the calendar led to the ordering of human life according to months, seasons and the year, and religion sacralized the whole order of social life.

The same religious outlook provided a sacral character to man's biological and social life from birth to death, as religiously significant rhythm. His birth, initiation into the adult community, education, marriage and even death were transformed through celebration into religious events. But the most important theme of feasts and celebrations was the entry of God into the human realm of existence, conceived either as symbolic and mythical or as real and historical. The act by which God saved humanity, his birth in humanity as an *avatar*, or incarnation, his sharing in the vicissitudes of human life and the like, became the object of memorial celebrations.



The theological problem in this respect will be to see the convergence between the psychological and social aspirations of man in instituting feasts and holding celebrations, on the one hand, and on the other, God's self-disclosure through human history, his adapting himself to the moods and attitudes of men. This issue of *Jeevadhara* is devoted to discussing this problem in an ecumenical and inter-religious perspective. In an introductory article I discuss the human implications of feasts from cosmic, psychological and historical points of view. Ernest McClain of Queen's College, New York, presents a very intriguing and interesting article on the mathematical structure basic to Indian, Pythagorean and Platonic scales of music that place Yahweh, Lord and Brahman, the Supreme Being, at the centre and focus of the whole cosmos. The data provided by McClain are surprising but convincing. Only experts in music, mythology and mathematics can tell us how far this unanimity of traditions is coincidental and how far it could be the result of a common understanding of religious traditions.

Frank Podgorski of Seatonhall Univeristy examines the meaning of religious symbolism and celebration in the Chinese tradition, while M. Amaladoss studies the same from a South Indian point of view. The Christian view of feasts is examined by Paul Puthanangady from the Catholic side.

The theme is very complex. Our intention is not to present a single methodology or a single viewpoint on the matter. An examination of the subject from different convergent angles will, we hope, enable theologians to take a more sympathetic and comprehensive view of feasts and celebrations in the religions of the world.

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# Man and Feast

The bear and the chimpanzee can play, but man alone can celebrate. Feasts and celebrations constitute a specific aspect of human nature providing a sort of link between the material and the spiritual realms of reality. It is also a clear function of religion that seeks to take man through the rhythm and growth of time to the timeless sphere of eternity. Since man first came to the consciousness of the life beyond, at the tragedy of death in the loss of a beloved one, feasts also started with funeral services. Then came the realization of the corroding effect of time on life and man tried to arrest its decay and rejuvenate it by celebrating what he took to be auspicious moments of time, in the year, the seasons, months, half-months and on special days. Significant events of past history and important ancestors as well as principal events of man's personal life became the focus of celebration as symbols and models of his march towards final self-fulfilment and happiness. Religious feasts follow this natural pattern of human experience. In this article we shall examine the basic ingredients of man's festal celebration and study the important religious implications.

## Funeral Feasts

When a person died his surviving relatives and friends tried to express their conviction in his translation to a life beyond through funeral celebrations. They wanted to maintain a certain communion with him and also provide for his happiness in every way possible. The ancient Etruscan tombs provide all indications that the dead man's relatives left food for him at the tomb, and the drawings on the walls of the funeral chambers show their belief in his survival beyond the grave in an immortal existence. It was only natural that the bereaved continued to cherish the memory of the departed and to try to maintain communion with him by holding, at his funeral, a feast in which he was supposed to be invisibly present. Since the family hearth and the common meal were the meeting-point of the members of the family and of friends, such funeral feasts laid emphasis on eating together. In almost all nations and cultures such funeral feasts were held and only in



present-day sophisticated societies have they lost most of their significance.<sup>1</sup> The Iliad of Homer describes in detail the elaborate games, contests and protracted eating held to celebrate the death of a friend or leader in battle. From these funeral feasts it was easy to pass on to holding annual feasts for the ancestors to come back and share in the life of their relatives, successors and friends.

### Annual and seasonal feasts: rejuvenation of time

Primitive man was very much concerned with the prospect of death and the destruction wrought on beings by the process of time. Hence annual and seasonal feasts were held to rejuvenate time by imitative magic. The Vedic sages of Hinduism tried to imitate the creative activity of gods in the beginning, and wanted to restore time to its original energy. This was the meaning of the New year festivities. In the *Rgveda* the year was personified as a father with seven hundred and twenty sons and daughters, the days and nights within a year. The Iranians also held the New Year (*Nauruz*) as their principal feast lasting for six days. Even the feast of Mihrajan, which was kept in honour of Mitra was a New-Year feast, indicating the beginning of the year according to a different calendar. The Babylonians too observed the New Year with great solemnity, and this was also the case with most of the ancient cultures.

The Hindu tradition attached great importance also to moon festivals, which lasted two days at the New Moon and one at the Full Moon. Among these Moon Festivals the seasonal four-month feast occurring at the end of four-month seasons indicated the division of the year into three principal seasons, and were kept with particular solemnity. In a lunar calendar the intercalary thirteenth month was considered specially significant, coming as a special bonus to a people constantly worried about the shortage of time. This month was considered equivalent to a full year and for that reason very auspicious.

In all these New Year, seasonal and monthly feasts the effort was to get in touch with the time before time; the origin

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1. cf. J. A. MacCullough. "Feasting", *Encycl. of Relig. and Ethics* (ERE) vol. V, p. 803.



of all things. "When gods prepared the sacrifice with Purusha as their offering, its oil was Spring, the holy gift was autumn"<sup>2</sup>, says the famous Purusha suktha of the Rgveda. The origin from which time and space started was a void: "Then was not non-existent nor existent; there was no realm of air, no sky beyond it."<sup>3</sup> The sages realized the root of all existents in that original non-existence or void which is often characterised as *māyā*, the creative power, which is a mixture of the sacred, the magical and the mythical.<sup>4</sup> This emergent time is something to be celebrated since its origin itself was from the creative sacrifice of Prajapati.<sup>5</sup> The Hindu religion celebrates a number of time-divinities. Time comes into being by the incitement of the god Savitar, who is called *satyasava* and *satyadharman*, in whom is truth by existence, and who creates truth.<sup>6</sup> Similarly Surya or Sun who presides over the day and rouses people for their daily activities is a god of time;<sup>7</sup> when he stretches forth his arms he lengthens the lives of men.<sup>8</sup>

If the Vedic man celebrated the deities that rejuvenated time and prolonged human life, later Hinduism became more pessimistic about the whole matter, and realized the inevitability of death and the inexorable decline of things. Hence it transferred the emphasis to the time divinities; Siva, Kāli, and Kala, or Yama, who destroyed all things and gathered them back into the original tranquillity. The figure of Siva as Nataraja is significant as typical of the human celebration of time as heading towards a final fulfilment. Generally Siva is depicted as dancing the *thāndava*, the destructive dance turning all things in anger to ashes. But he is also shown as performing a dance of harmony in the midst of a large group of gods including Indra, Brahma, Vishnu, Parvati and Lakshmi, who all participate in the dance in a golden hall symbolizing the central point of the universe. What are celebrated in the dancing figure of Siva are the five divine activities, *śṛṣṭi* (creation), *sthiti* (preservation) *saṃhāra* (destruction) *tirobhava* (veiling) and *anugraha* (salvation).<sup>9</sup>

2. *RV* X, 90, 6.

3. *RV* X, 42

4. *RV* V, 85, 5

5. *RV* X, 90, 6; 129, 1—3.

6. *AV* VII, 14, 1; *RV* I, 110, 3.

7. *AV* XIII, 2, 14. 15.

8. *RV* VII, 62, 5.

9. A. K. Coomaraswamy. *The Dance of Siva*, Fourteen Indian Essays. New York: The Noonday Press, 1957, p. 57.



### Feasts as a celebration of life-situations

But more concrete occasions for celebration presented themselves in the special events of an individual's life. The birth of a child, especially of a male child, in an agricultural society, was an important event, and was marked by special festivities. Equally important was the initiation which introduced the youth into the life of the community. In tribal societies the event was marked by feasting and many ceremonies to indicate that the individual was admitted to the privileges of the tribe. In Hinduism *upanayana*, or initiation to *brahmacharya* or studenthood, is an occasion of special celebration. According to the law books one is a brahmin by birth, becomes a *dvija*, or twice-born, through initiation, and a *vipra* or wise man by learning. In Greece the initiation of youth into the Eleusian mysteries was preceded by several days of fasting and a solemn procession from Athens to Eleusis, and followed by joyous celebrations. Marriage is observed with significant ceremonies followed by feasting in all societies.

### Family and community feasts

The two principal centers of feasts and celebrations in traditional societies are the family and the particular community. In Hinduism the family was considered primarily a sacrificial community and the very word '*patni*' for wife was supposed to indicate that she was made participant of the '*yajña*', or sacrifice of the husband. Her duty was to maintain the sacrificial fires and supply the offerings. The law books provided elaborate ritual for the celebration of family feasts embracing details like milking the cow and the cutting of grass, and the different classes of priests were welcomed by the head of the family as gods.<sup>10</sup>

The Bible also gives ample evidence to show that the normal farm activities like shearing the sheep and gathering in the agricultural produce were occasions for celebration. The Book of Job speaks of the annual festival when the members of the family were sanctified and offered burned offerings.<sup>11</sup> Sheep-shearing was an occasion for much feasting. The "first" of the shorn wool

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10. cf. *Jaimini*, IX, 1; *Tait. Samhita*. III, 5; P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, II, part 2.

11. *Job* . 1, 5.



had to be given to the Sanctuary.<sup>12</sup> Similarly the joy of Spring and of harvest, contrasted with the death and inactivity of Winter, called for celebration. The Canaanites, who inhabited Palestine before the Hebrews, celebrated the Baal-Anat cycle, the epic of the dying god of fertility in which Baal and Anat represented opposite forces. Beset with supernatural foes Baal, the young weather god, takes up the challenge as a warrior in the guise of the dying and reviving god of vegetation. Similarly the drama of the "gracious gods" was observed to celebrate the festival of the first fruits.

### Hebrew Religious Feasts

When the Israelites settled in Palestine their God was a desert deity perhaps common to several desert tribes designated differently as *Yahweh*, *Ahi-yahu*, *Ya*, *Yarni*, *Yaum-ilum*, etc.<sup>13</sup> But in the new situation he eventually assumed the functions of the indigenous vegetation gods, riding on the clouds and sending rain to the earth, speaking in thunder and manifest in the lightning and engaging in battle with the primeval dragon.<sup>14</sup> So the Hebrews could easily take over the agricultural festivals of Canaan, adding their own specific meaning to them. The Spring festival was transformed into the Passover or Pasch, observed at the full moon nearest to the vernal equinox, thus combining the solar and lunar calendars. Its central ceremony was the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb representing the shepherd's natural offering, to the fertility divinity, of the first fruits of his flock in Spring in a lunar setting. According to Frazer the Israelite remembrance on the occasion of the killing of the first-born of Egyptians by the Angel of Yahweh was a transformation of this offering of the firstlings. In the beginning the firstlings might have been human children, later mitigated by the substitution of the firstlings of the flock.<sup>15</sup>

With this was later combined the barley-harvest festival of Massoth or Unleavened Bread, an offering of the first fruits. In Babylon it was connected with the annual festival of Shamash, the Sun-God, held on the 7th of Nisan, and in Israel it was

12. *Deut.* 18, 4.

13. cf. Albright. *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, p. 64; *Journ. Bibl. Litt.* 47 (1948) p. 380

14. *Ps.* 48, 14; 17, 4; *Jud.* 2, 6-3, 6; 5, 4 etc.

15. *Golden Bough* pt. IV, p. 176;



celebrated in the month of Adib (Nisan) at the vernal equinox. The distinction of this feast from the Pasch is clear from the provision for the supplementary feast of the unleavened bread in the following month for those who could not take part in it in Nisan. There is no mention of the lamb.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly the feast of Weeks of Pentecost was on the occasion of the wheat harvest when a sheaf of wheat, and loaves made of fine flour from the new corn baked with leaven, were offered to Yahweh.<sup>17</sup> This feast again was a midsummer feast taken over from the agricultural community of the Canaanites.<sup>18</sup> In the same way the feast of the Tabernacles was the autumn festival marking the grape harvest celebrated by the Canaanites at the autumnal equinox.<sup>19</sup> In the post-exilic period the Hebrews adopted also the Babylonian New-Year festival or *Roshhash Shanah*.

But Israel did not blindly adopt these feasts from the Canaanites that inhabited Palestine before them. She indeed, recognized in them the authentic value of nature festivals that emphasized the presence of the Lord in creation. But she placed greater emphasis on the great interventions of God in her own history to save her at critical moments of disaster. Thus Pasch was not merely a Spring festival but primarily a commemoration of Israel's liberation from slavery under Pharaoh in Egypt. The Feast of Tabernacles was observed specially to commemorate the rededication of the temple after the Babylonian captivity<sup>20</sup>. These feasts also emphasized the transcendence of Yahweh over the deities of other peoples. Besides, Israel had feasts that expressed religious sentiments uniquely her own. Though the dominant notes of worship were joy, trust and triumph over her enemies, it also had an abiding sense of sorrow for its past infidelities to the Lord. Thus she observed, from post-exilic

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16. Num. 1, 1-14

17. Ex. 34, 22; Lev. 23, 17; Deut. 16, 9-12

18. Roland de Vaux O. P. *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961, p. 494

19. Ex. 23, 16; 34, 22; De Vaux, *l. c.* p. 501.

20. Ezra. 3, 3. 4; Haggai 2, 2;



times, the Day of Atonement, an annual feast of expiation.<sup>21</sup> Similarly she kept up the Hanukka or Dedication festival to commemorate the rededication of the temple after its defilement by Antioches Epiphanes in 168 B. C., as well as the Feast of Purim to recall the victories of Israel over her enemies, the Persian king Ahasuerus and the Syrian general Nicanor of Adasa. The central emphasis of Israel's feasts was on the presence of God and his providence for the people in her present life and in the past.

### Religious events and Christian feasts

This concern for historical events in feasts and celebrations central to Judaic feasts was carried over into Christianity. Israel celebrated several events in its history as God's saving interventions. Christians regarded all the great deeds of God centered in a single event, designated as the Christ event, the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. The annual Commemoration of this event was the Pasch comprising Good Friday and Easter Sunday. This Christ event is commemorated in the daily sacrifice of the Mass, in the weekly Sunday observance and in the feast of Easter. Clement of Alexandria connects the feast of Easter with its Jewish prototype of the Pasch; the rising of Christ fulfilled the symbolism of the first day of the week of harvest on which the priest offered the first sheaf according to the Law.<sup>22</sup> Christ was the first fruit from the dead. The feast of Resurrection was the feast of feasts.<sup>23</sup> Later the feast of the Ascension on the fortieth day after Easter was introduced as forming an integral part of the glorification of Christ and the completion of his work of redemption.<sup>24</sup> In several places harvest and Spring rites were added on to the celebration of these feasts to make them more humanly appealing.<sup>25</sup> Pentecost on which the Holy Spirit came down on the Apostles was also conceived as closely related to the mystery of the Resurrection, since it concluded the fifty days of rejoicing following Easter.

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21. *Lev. cc. 16 & 17*

22. *Chronicon Paschale*, I, 14;

23. *Leo. Serm. xlvii in Exod.*

24. *Gregory of Nyssa. PG. xlvii, 690; Chrysostom. PG 1, 1441-52*

25. cf. E. O. James. *Seasonal Feasts and Festivals*, New York: Barnes and Noble, 1961, p. 217 ff.



Though the celebration of the Christ event was the main focus of Christian feasts the need to celebrate the different seasons had a certain influence on the development of other feasts. Easter took care of Spring and Ascension and Pentecost of the harvest festivals. To mark the summer solstice June 24 was fixed from the 5th century in the Roman calendar as the feast of the Nativity of John the Baptist, and was observed solemnly with the celebration of three Masses. St. Augustine specially alludes to the celebration of this feast at midsummer.<sup>26</sup> The Eastern Church attaching greater importance to John's historical relation to Christ held his feast in January soon after Christ's Baptism. Similarly, at the approach of autumn a feast was thought necessary and the feast of St. Michael, the oldest of the Angel festivals was fixed for September 29 as a fitting introduction to the autumnal struggle with forces of darkness. This symbolism of the sun's declining rays in autumn was further emphasized in the 9th century by transference to November 1 of the commemoration of the saints held till then on different dates in different places. This was an attempt to counteract and Christianize the All Hallows' Eve festival current in northern and central Europe. In the same way the winter solstice, when the power of the sun was at the lowest, needed festivities to rejuvenate it and the pagan Roman Saturnalia was an attempt in that direction. People had no definite idea about the date of birth of Christ, and the thought of fixing a birthday feast for him did not occur in the beginning. In the Eastern Church a feast was started on January 6 to commemorate the Baptism of Christ, and later, by the middle of the 4th century, commemoration of Christ's nativity was added on. In 353 Pope Liberius wanted to counteract the Saturnalia and the Mithraic feast of *Natalis Solis Invicti*, and fixed December 25th as Christmas. The East followed suit.

### The meaning of human celebrations

When the origin and development of feasts in various traditions are examined certain fundamental principles concerning the nature of man himself become evident. In celebrations man proclaims his transcendence over, and freedom from, all his worldly pursuits and asserts his right to be simply himself, his

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26. St. Augustine. *Serm.* 287 PL 38 col. 301.



capacity to rise above time and perceive its eternal meaning. He tries to bring the different sensoria of his experience together to intensify his vision and assert the complementarity between spiritual intuition and external experience. A closer study of such basic dimensions of human celebration will bring out more clearly the meaning and purpose of religious feasts.

### Man the focus of celebrations

An oft-forgotten fact is that man himself is the primary focus of his celebrations. What makes him different from the animals is his capacity to celebrate, and this is rooted in his capacity to understand what he is and what he is doing. Even when he celebrates the mysteries and events of gods and deities he knows fully well that God does not need the human celebration; it is for man. Through feasts and celebrations man should arrive at a certain understanding of his spiritual excellence and destiny far above and beyond the functions of this material world. The fundamental idea behind the Sabbath rest of Judaism and the Sunday observance of Christianity is not only man's obligation to devote some time to worshipping God, but also to emphasize the fact that man is not a slave of his work and of his material needs. He has regularly to take some time off to remind himself of his freedom. This need to affirm man's standing above his daily chores of duty and the structures of social life was implied even in social festivals like the Feast of Fools in medieval Europe, and Holi in India. Such occasions freed people from social conventions and allowed them to forget even differences in social status. Man is higher than all social structures, offices and positions. Of course, such occasions of fun and frolic like the carnivals sometimes degenerated into irresponsibility and license. But rather than granting man a moral holiday, their original intention was to present the authentic image of man as being superior to all the structures and conventions he generally submits to.

Hence, feasts have an eschatological aspect too, since they show forth the "initial aim", the presence of the end in the beginning, the present as already containing the end aimed at. The aim and goal of all spiritual processes is man himself, and he is the constant factor from beginning to end. His authenticity and freedom were not be submitted to anything else.



## Time and feast

Another important factor intrinsic to feasts is the time. Time is a dimension of material reality and shows its degenerating and deteriorating character. Still, it has a positive aspect as well since it indicates the endurance of a thing in existence. This limited and finite existence of the material thing is shared from the infinite and subsistent existence of the Absolute and has therefore a certain participation in eternity. Feasts and celebrations try to capture and perpetuate this enduring aspect of time and thereby arrest its course and rejuvenate it. Freshness of origin, the newness of each moment, increase, growth and exuberance of life, are all positive aspects of time while decrease, old age and decay are its negative signs. Festivities try to hide and heal these negative marks and to foster and increase the positive traits.

Here religious feasts have a special significance. Primitive man, confronted with the inevitability of his own death, deified time, and death itself. This enabled him to look beyond death and see that life extended into eternity under the benevolent protection of a divinity. For example in Hinduism Kāla, god of death, Kālī the goddess of destruction endearingly addressed as the benign mother, and Siva the final destroyer of all things, were time divinities symbolizing the gathering back of all beings into their origin and final resting-place: the loving providence of God for all beings. Feasts tried to show forth the divine meaning of time by celebrating the specific moments in which God manifested himself and acted in time in a special way. As points of auspicious encounter with eternity they indicated not mere *chronos* or *kāla*, clock time, but *kairos* or *abhika*: opportune and auspicious time.

This distinctive character of sacred time may be viewed either from the point of view of mythology and symbolism or from that of real history. Myth looks at worldly events from the angle of the divine and sees it as the shadow of eternity. Particularity and accuracy are secondary in that perspective. What is important here is man's intention to see the divine reflected in his time-bound existence. This is the central factor in liturgical worship and celebration. We celebrate December 25 not because it is Christmas, but rather we make it Christmas by celebrating the birth of Christ on that particular date. There is no such



objective existing in itself as Christmas, Epiphany, Easter and Pentecost, which people are called upon to celebrate. Collective and sacramental recalling of past events, the actualizing of them in the present with regard to their spiritual effectiveness and the realizing of their eschatological character pointing towards the final fulfilment at the end of days make these feasts Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Pentecost and the like. Hindu worship, especially in the Agamic tradition, makes this point particularly clear. Each temple and idol is dedicated to a particular aspect of the absolute Deity as Vishnu or Siva, and to a particular mystery of the deity's manifestation in time. The adornments of the temple and the daily worship scrupulously conform to this particular aspect of the mystery. The different festivals celebrated on different occasions are intended to enable the people to enter emotionally and experientially into the presence of the deity in the different seasons and the different facets and moods of the life of the people.

But it is possible to look at the divine mystery also from the point of view of time and history, where the particularity of time and accuracy of events are of great importance. The linear concept of time and history views events as a progressive movement towards the realization of a definite plan of human salvation. In this perspective sacral events like the resurrection of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles on the day of Pentecost are definite milestones in the pilgrimage of humanity, under divine guidance, to its final destiny. Hence, their historical reality and their time-place circumstances are not indifferent details but pertain to the substance of the definitive realization of the salvific plan. This was the outlook in which occurred the controversies concerning the date of Easter which almost rent the early Church into two groups. Commonly agreed dates for these feasts in the universal Church put their historical foundation beyond doubt. The death and glory of each saint were considered a moment in this historical progress of humanity towards its goal. Hence the celebration of feasts of saints of dubious historical authenticity like Philomena and Christopher, though in themselves conducive to the edification of common people, would not be in tune with the proper understanding of salvation history and of the salvation event that is being realized and celebrated every day in each member of humanity.



### Feasts, moments of common concern

The feasts celebrated by various religious traditions have certain similarities that indicate some basic concerns of man. The principal point of celebration is the memorial of the event that marked salvation of humanity or of the particular society. Thus Christianity has its central feast in the celebration of the resurrection of Christ that marked humanity's victory over sin and death, just as Hebrews celebrated the Pasch to commemorate their liberation from the slavery of Egypt. Hindu Saivites observe Sivaratri to recall the mythological event of Siva's drinking up of the poison that came up from the churning of the Sea of Milk by gods and demons and threatened to destroy all beings. Buddhists commemorate Siddhartha Gautama Buddha's enlightenment under the bodhi tree as well as his *mahaparinirvana* or final liberation. Muslims observe the memory of Mohammed's victory over the Meccans.

Another theme that stands out in feasts is the birth of the religious leader as in Christmas for Christians, the birth of Krishna for Hindus and the birth of Mohammed for Muslims. Buddhist tradition created a great many stories woven around the birth of Buddha. The birth of these religious leaders was considered an entry of the divine into humanity and hence particularly auspicious. Besides the New Year and seasonal festivals that are common to all cultures, most traditions have also a feast of light like Epiphany for Christians and Deepavali for Hindus. Thus, in substance, through feasts man is celebrating his own basic concerns, salvation, the entry of God into human history, the presence of the eternal in time and the expectation of a passage from the unreality of the world to enduring reality, from darkness to light and from death to immortality.

### Intuition and celebration

Feasts are often taken as a concession to the low intellectual capacity of the common man, who cannot directly grasp high religious principles. Feasts were said to be instituted and centred around religious mysteries as a pedagogical device to provide people with a modest understanding of those lofty mysteries. As we have seen, sometimes feasts were used as a means to draw away the common people from wordly fun and frolic.



But the most important fact is that feasts and celebrations belong to the very psychological make-up of man and form an integral part of his religious experience. Man is not a pure spirit and he cannot live on abstract truths; his religious experience must combine intuition of the highest values of the spirit with their expression in the emotional and experiential aspects of daily life.

This is particularly true of our modern age of 'communication' explosion. We have put behind us an age of rational formulations and theoretical systems and have entered an age of electric information and environment, where ideas and the most spiritual truths are brought home to us through sound and colour, clear thought and emotional involvement, reminding us of the earlier ages of humanity of folklore, dance and celebration. If so far the left hemisphere of the human brain, linear, logical and goal-oriented, dominated human behaviour, today the emphasis has shifted to the right hemisphere: oral, musical, intuitive and social. It will be anachronistic to remain with mere dry rational formulations of religious faith at a time when every other idea is celebrated in colour and drama. Feasts, celebrations and symbolism are not mere means for expressing a faith integrally possessed prior to them, but are the integral way in which faith itself is being realized. Hence modern man cannot afford to leave them behind as the domain of the unintelligent and uneducated, but has to take them seriously and develop them carefully so that they may accurately and adequately express faith itself.

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# Our Musical Sabbath

## Vedic Origins of the Tetragrammaton

The Tetragrammaton YHWH, the "Great Name of God", "explicit", "complete", "unique", and "saving", became the "incommunicable name" long before the Christian era. Today we vocalize these letters as YaHWeH and translate them as LORD (in capitals), but the Jews traditionally substituted *Adonay* or other circumlocutions wherever YHWH appeared in a text. Men who had received special instruction in pronouncing this secret name, first revealed to Moses on Mt. Horeb, were permitted to teach it "only to their sons and disciples, once a week".<sup>1</sup> Then catastrophic history intervened.

This essay will show how the four letters YHWH, possessing the numerical values 10-5-6-5 in Hebrew mathematical notation, can be read as the cabalistic formula for a very beautiful construction in mathematical harmonics. The YHWH tonal material appears to be a very elegant compression of an all-embracing Vedic construction. The modal theory of mediaeval Christendom preserved in a precise way the central lesson in both Vedic and Hebraic constructions. Our adventure into musical number theory will thus suggest how the transcendental unity often proclaimed for Hindu, Hebrew, and Christian religions historically possessed an irreducible common ground in the science of number applied specifically to tone.

I must emphasize at the outset that, while the tonal and arithmetical material presented here can be checked by anyone acquainted with "Pythagorean" musical mathematics, the interpretation is subjective and therefore must be considered speculative until scholars in the various disciplines concerned decide how much of it is plausible. In *The Myth of Invariance* I have

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1. Leo Schaya, *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1971), p. 146



documented the material as fully as possible, trying to make plain the debts my work in this interdisciplinary study of esoteric religious symbolism owes to others.<sup>2</sup> Here I can only summarize results and suggest a few implications.

My basic hypothesis is that the arithmetical and geometrical elements in virtually all ancient mythology has logical roots in "Pythagorean" musical mathematics. Cosmology, be it Greek, Hebrew, Hindu, Babylonian, Sumerian, Chinese, or Egyptian, developed around numerical insights into the surprisingly related problems of devising a calendar and defining a scale while using only *natural numbers* (i. e. integers). In brief, the Creator who needed six "days" in Genesis actually needed the ratios derived from the first six integers — 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 — to form the basic *heptatonic* (7-tone) scales and their "chromatic (11-tone) super-set" in Chart 1. He rested on the seventh "day" because the number 7 was not useful as a "tone-generator", although it dominated the ancient theory of music by limiting the number of different tones which could co-exist in an octave to exactly seven (i. e. the first and eighth tone being "octave-equivalences" of ratio 1:2, sharing the *same* names in our modern alphabetical notation).

The diatonic-heptatonic scales in Chart 1 are linked analogically at the arithmetical level to a schematic 30-day month, 60-day double month, 120-day season, 360-day year, and to the notion of 720 "days and nights in a year". The fact that throughout history the Jews maintained a strictly lunar calendar which cannot use these numbers — incorporated into their neighbors' calendars—should alert us to the different perspective monotheism developed from this same harmonical ground.

That Hebrew authors knew the tonal functions of the numbers in Chart 1 is an inference from the Bible. Notice that we are concerned with a standard Greek two-octave scale and its reciprocal, both progressing via similar *tetrachords* (groups of four tones). The rising scale is the Greek Dorian mode, normative in

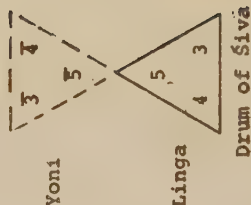
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2. Ernest G. McClain, *The Myth of Invariance: the Origin of the Gods, Mathematics, and Music from the RgVeda to Plato*, New York: Nicolas Hays Ltd., in preparation).



### The Greek Dorian Scale and its Reciprocal (Ptolemy's Diatonic Synteron).

Ratios	30	32	36	40	45	48	54	60	64	72	80	90	96	108	120
Increase	288	270	240	216	192	180	160	144	135	120	108	96	90	80	72
Tones	D	c $\sharp$	b	A	G	f $\sharp$	e	d	c $\sharp$	b	A	G	f $\sharp$	e	d
Falling	D	c $\sharp$	b	A	G	f $\sharp$	e	d	c $\sharp$	b	A	G	f $\sharp$	e	d
Tones	D	c $\sharp$	b	A	G	f $\sharp$	e	d	c $\sharp$	b	A	G	f $\sharp$	e	d



## The 11-tone "Chromatic Super-Set"

	360	384	400	432	450	480	540	576	600	648	675	720
1st octave	360	384	400	432	450	480	540	576	600	648	675	720
2nd octave	720	768	800	864	900	960	1080	1152	1200	1296	1350	1440
rising	D	e♭	e	f	f♯	G	A	b♭	b	c	c♯	D
falling	D	c♯	c	b	b♭	A	G	f♯	f	e	e♭	D

## Chart 1: Foundations of Tonal Cosmology



ancient times, and its falling reciprocal scale we recognize as being in the modern major mode. The ratios are those of "Just" tuning, derivable from "pure" musical fifths of ratio 2 : 3 and "pure" musical thirds of ratio 4 : 5. Now the *smallest integer* giving entry into this tone-number field is 30, the age when Joseph, like a Socratic "guardian", became Pharaoh's minister, the age when Christ began his own ministry, and the number of pieces of silver which formalized his betrayal. The set which begins with 30 ends two octaves later on 120, the age the Bible decrees as the normal life of man, the age at which Moses died, the number of trumpeters in Solomon's temple, and the number of disciples at the first Pentecost. The accompanying number set, Platonic "friend" of the first, "sharing all things (= tones) in common" (but in reverse order), begins on 72, allegedly the number of translators of the Septuagint from Hebrew into Greek, and ends on 288, the number of professional singers in David's temple. But 288 plays a far more important role, for it is encoded cabalistically in Genesis 1:2 as the number of "sparks" into which the Divine Unity subdivided in His "first egression towards substantiality" (i. e. it is the amount of "light" at the creation).<sup>3</sup> The unusual Hebrew word for "hovered" in the phrase, "and the spirit of God *hovered* over the face of the waters", consists of three letters, *Raysh* = 200, *Phay* = 80, and *Hhayt* = 8, plus prefix and suffix. Miraculously, this informative bit of "gematria" (the science of letter-numbers) still survives today within the Jewish cabalistic tradition.

There is more. The number 60 in the set of smaller numbers, associated with the central tone, was actually written as a large "One" in Babylonian sexagesimal notation, meaning 60<sup>+J</sup>—due to the "place-value" character of that cuneiform system, so that it also stood for any positive or negative power of 60. This value was deified by the Sumerian-Babylonian Anu (An), most venerable of the gods in that pantheon, in which the first sixty integers all were gods. Sixty is the age at which Isaac fathered

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3. Jacob Immanuel Schochet, "Mystical Concepts in Chassidism," published as an introduction to the English translation of *Likutei Amarim-Tanya* by R. Schneur Zalman, (London: The Soncino Press Limited, 1973) p. 870.



Jacob and Esau. Sixty was also the "unit-radius" in Babylonian-Greek geometry and MESE (= middle) of the monochord on which Ptolemy recorded the ancient tunings. The "friend" of sixty in the reciprocal set is 144, the fundamental dimension of New Jerusalem.

Finally, notice that the "chromatic super-set" requires integers within the 360:720 "double" for the first octave, and within 720:1440 for the second. The gematria for Adam reads ADM = 1-4-40 in Hebrew, and I interpret it as 1, 440 an encompassing two-octave chromatic limit allied to the 288 "sparks" of the diatonic limit. Thus our fundamental harmonic construction has linked circumstantially, and aptly, Adam, Isaac, Moses, Joseph, Solomon, David, Christ, the "light" of creation, the musicians of the temple, and the proselytizers of the new faith,—in ways which I doubt are accidental.

From this foundation let us leap across all intermediate stages of harmonic development to the all-embracing Hindu vision of *Puruṣa*, "Embodied Man". In Chart 2 I have graphed *Puruṣa* as an extension of the linga-yoni generating yantras of Chart 1, limited by the "index" of 155,520,000,000,000 which measures "the duration of the universe" which comes into being when he is dismembered.<sup>4</sup> Since all subordinate Indian cycles are integral subdivisions of this cosmic duration—the schematic diagrams of Chart 1 can be "translated" and "reciprocated" freely (i. e. moved up and down or right and left, and rotated 180°) within the boundaries of Chart 2—it is easy to appreciate the Hindu imagery of creation proceeding from the "dismembering sacrifice" of such a "primal being".<sup>5</sup> The algebraic yantra for

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4. The calculation of the "duration" number is described by Heinrich Zimmer in *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 15-16, and by Alain Daniélou in *Hindu Polytheism*, (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1964) p. 249.

5. An introductory study of the musical and mathematical logic of India can be found in the works of Antonio T. de Nicolás, beginning with *Four Dimensional Man: The Philosophical methodology of the Rigveda*, (Bangalore: Dharmaram College 1971), and continuing with *Avatara: the Humanization of Philosophy Through the Bhagavad Gita*, (New York: Nicolas Hays Ltd., 1976). A revised edition of *Four-Dimensional Man* is in preparation by Nicolas Hays Ltd.



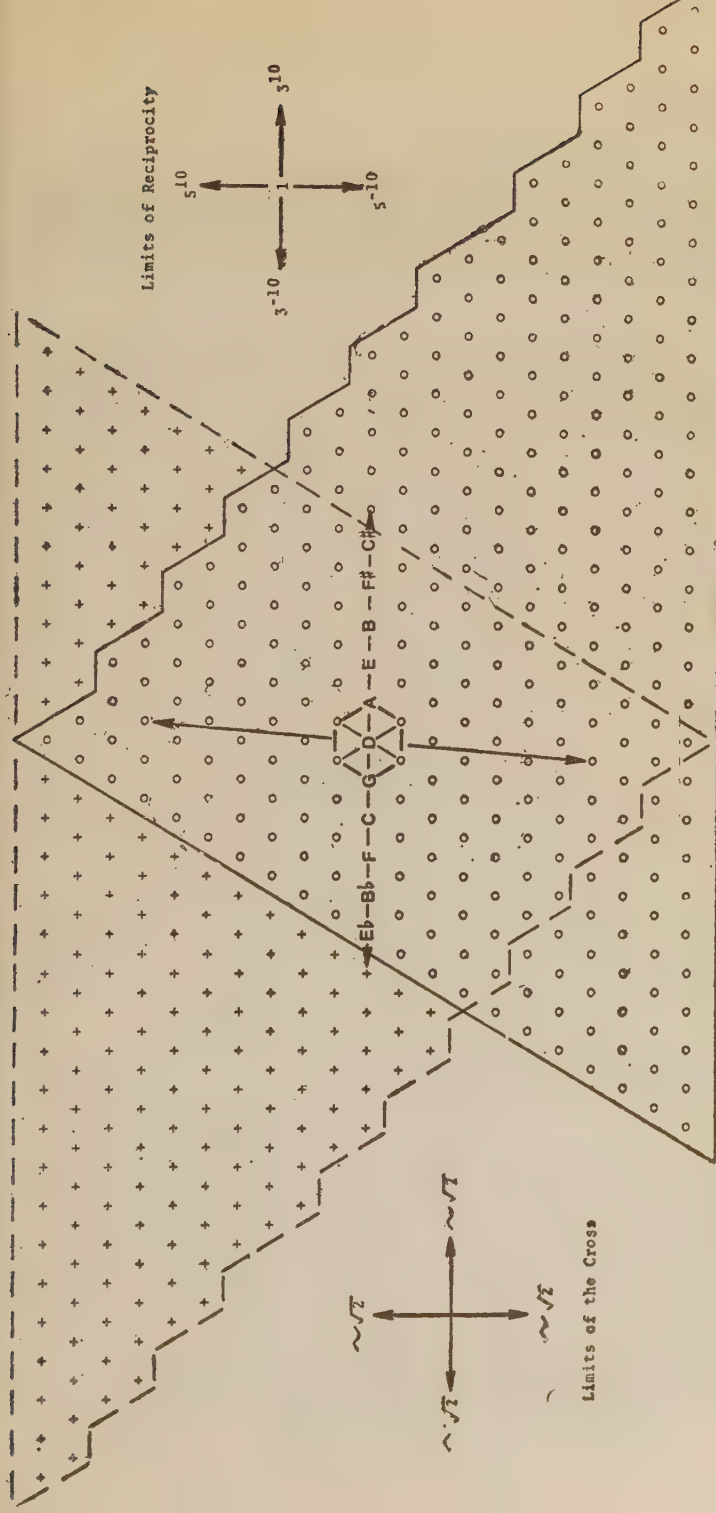


Chart 2: Puruṣa ("Embodied Man") or "The Duration of the Universe"



*Puruṣa* is essentially the multiplication table for  $3 \times 5$ , arbitrarily cut off at the index, together with a reciprocal yantra which keeps alive the reciprocal functions of the integers (as *multiples* and *submultiples*) and their isomorphic tone-field of rising-falling intervals.

To visualize the tone-number field represented in Chart 2, think of each "pebble" in the base of the yantra as symbolizing powers of "the divine male number 3", from  $3^0 = 1$  on the left to  $3^{29}$  on the right, correlating with musical fifths (or twelfths). And think of each ascending row of pebbles as containing one more power of "the human male number 5", from  $5^0 = 1$  in the first row to  $5^{14}$  at the peak, correlating with successive "pure" musical thirds (i. e. The "planimetric" pattern is an expansion of that in Chart 1). Remember that this "mountain of God" has a "third dimension" consisting of powers of "the female number 2", which can be suppressed here because they generate only "octave equivalences" of tones defined by smaller "odd = male" numbers. We are engaged in a drastic reduction of Vedic-Greek "Teness"—a study of the cosmological roles of the first ten integers—and Babylonian-Hebraic "Sixness"—a study of the first six integers—by concentrating on the *prime numbers* 2, 3, 5 and 7. We first eliminated 7 as tone generator (giving it a "Sabbatical") while preserving it as a matrix limit (the basic sets have seven tones), and then eliminated 2 on the grounds that it teaches us nothing new, although it also has a "mother = matrix" function in providing "octave-doubles" within which fractions can be avoided. Here, in this highly compressed *Puruṣa* yantra, we catch a glimpse of the mentality which produced the hymns of the *Rgveda*, *Enuma Elish*, and the *Book of the Dead* some millenia before Pythagoras brought such musical insights home to Greece.

In the center of the double yantra is the Mitra-Varuna "linch-pin" of the universe, symbolized by  $D = 1 = \text{geometrical mean}$  in the *field of rational numbers*, transformed here to 155, 520, 000, 000, 000 to act as *least common denominator* for the tone-field within the common boundaries of reciprocal yantras. The "cosmic waters" extend ten rows above and below the "transversing axis" representing the horizon, or "dry land", which similarly extends ten places to right and left of what was originally the "cosmic seed = 1" (symmetric center of the tone-field).



The twenty-one vertical layers are the “fire-sticks” in which Agni, Savior-Savitar, is born (presumably as the missing twelfth tone,  $A\flat = G\sharp$ ). While the double yantra contains twenty-one elements on the horizontal axis, a single one contains only sixteen, the number of priests who officiate at the sacrifice. Only the eleven elements assigned tone-names belong to reciprocal yantras; the first five elements on the left and the last five on the right must literally be “sacrificed” because a “Pythagorean comma” of ratio 524288 : 531441 arises between any tone considered as “leader” and its “twelfth disciple”, for these tones belong to the same sequence of musical fifths (unlike the “Just” tuning of Chart 1, which employed some pure thirds from neighboring rows). The eleven tones which are named are the prestigious “Pythagorean scale”, “Brahmin” tones in Sanskrit musicology, “citizens of the highest property class” in Platonic political metaphor, a R̥gvedic bride’s “husband and ten sons”, and possibly the Hebrew God with a “minyan” of ten men, for reasons to be explored in a moment. Reflect for a moment that this tuning is the only one Christian centuries knew (it is the closest approximation to equal-temperament among any of the ancient tunings) until a growing fondness for “pure” triad harmonies of 4 : 5 : 6 generated renewed interest in the Just tuning of Chart 1. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries A. D. Europe wrestled anew with a conflict the ancient world had studied probably 5000 years earlier. The necessity for keeping instruments simple enough to be playable while modulating freely through all possible keys eventually forced a 12-tone compromise on instruments of fixed pitch (with keyboards and frets). The vertical arrows in Chart 2 point to a pair of very close approximations to  $A\flat = G\sharp = \sqrt{2}$ , an *irrational number* which the ancient affection for *tonal symmetry* had to wrestle with centuries, and perhaps millenia, before it was *known* that *rational numbers* could not solve all problems which arise in metric theory. The horizontal arrows point to  $A\flat \neq G\sharp$  in the series of musical fifths which constitute Pythagorean tuning, a somewhat worse approximation to  $\sqrt{2}$ .

It is intriguing that Joseph descended into Egypt with seventy men, that Moses ascended a mountain with seventy men



(to peer into the promised land he was personally forbidden to enter), and that there are exactly *seventy pairs* of mutually reciprocal elements above and below the central “transevering axis” of Chart 2 (i. e., common to both yantras). What is even more intriguing, however, is the fact that when the Tetragrammaton YHWH = 10-5-6-5 is read cabalistically as  $5^{10} \times 6^5$  it becomes a formula which carries us straight to “God on the mountain” in the center of the yantra. Ascend 10 rows to the eleventh row axis via 10 powers of 5, and then move 5 places to the right via 5 powers of 6 (equivalent here to powers of 3).

In Chart 3 I have multiplied,  $5^{10} \times 6^5 = 75, 937, 500, 000$ , to find the limiting “index” for a YHWH yantra. Notice that the YHWH double yantra is the same height as the Vedic one, while the horizontal axis has lost all of the superfluous elements which had to be “sacrificed” any way. Notice too that the formula 10-5-6-5 has a double meaning; it defines both the shape of the yantra, which extends ten places above and below and five places to the right and left of God = 1 = geometric mean in the field of all rational numbers, and it defines the limiting “index” which actually produces this shape. The general “hour-glass” shape of our Hebrew “holy mountain” reveals its kinship with the Buddhist Mt. Meru, or Sumeru, and the seven tones of the axis common to reciprocal yantras constitute *Modus Primus* in mediaeval music theory, the only mode whose rising-falling patterns are identical.

rising	D	E	F	G	A	B	C	D
falling	D	C	B	A	G	F	E	D
ratios	432	486	512	576	648	729	768	864

The limiting digits, 432 and 864, when multiplied by various powers of ten, define the intermediate cycles of Indian cosmology. And 432 is the year traditionally assigned to St. Patrick’s arrival in Ireland, a number Irish priests probably knew from the Church’s great affection for Plato’s *Timaeus*, in which the number 432 functioned as the center of symmetry for a “World-Soul” developed from the musical scale. If Plato scholars had investigated more seriously the “opposite” dialectical meanings always



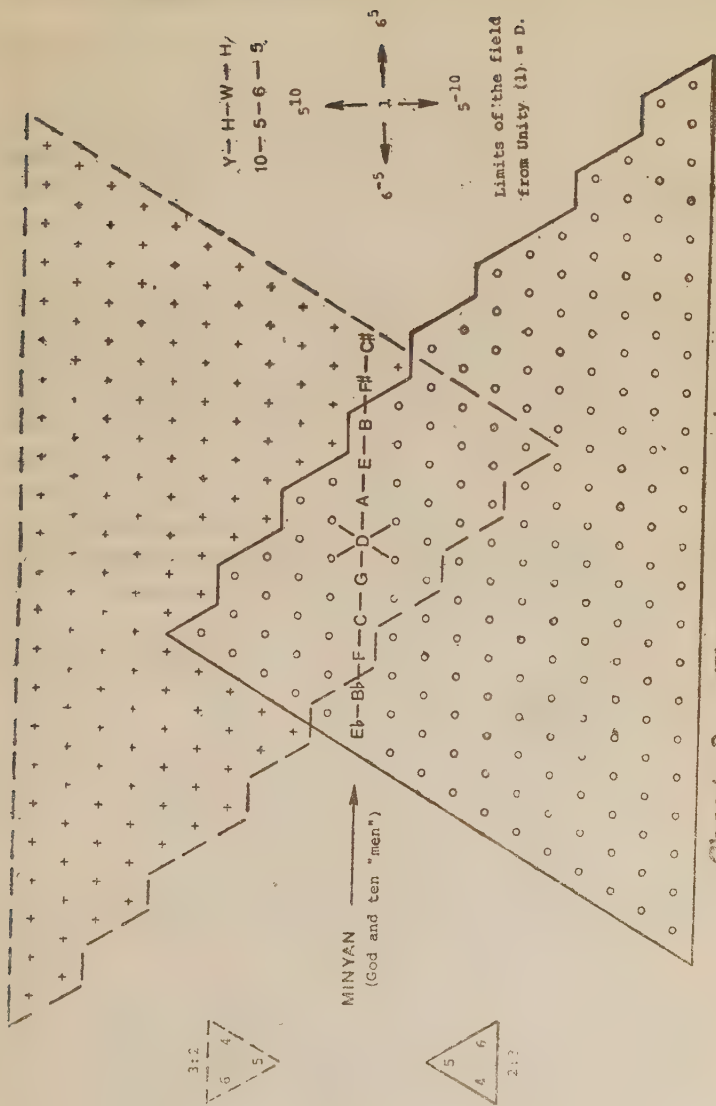


Chart 3: The Tetragrammaton YHWH



relevant to his numbers, they would have discovered all eleven tones in the transevering axis of our Vedic and Hebraic yantras.

Platonic	E	D	C	B	A	G	F	E	falling
tradition <i>or</i>	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C	rising
	384	432	486	512	576	648	729	768	ratios
Suggested	D	C	B $\flat$	A	G	F	E $\flat$	D	falling
correction <i>and</i>	D	E	F $\sharp$	G	A	B	C $\sharp$	D	rising
		*	*	*	*				

This brief presentation offers a new tool, that of "Pythagorean" harmonical analysis, by which the numerology embedded in ancient mythology can be studied for a possible rational content. I have suggested how an absolute tonal unity has pervaded Hindu cosmology, Biblical arithmology, Platonic political allegory, and Christian musical practice. I hope that other scholars will test for themselves the methodology employed here. What we stand to gain is a profound, new respect for the rational intelligence of the ancient poets who created our world religions, and a conception of deity free from the accidents of history.

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# An Ancient Chinese Model of 'Celebration'

Responding to deeply-felt needs, the *Decree on Sacred Liturgy* of the Second Vatican Council encouraged liturgists to "nourish and cultivate" interior spiritual growth corresponding to the noble ideals expressed by external rituals. This contemporary aim echoes the ancient Confucian goal of creating correct "*Li*" (rites, ceremonies); "beautiful and effective Confucian ceremony requires personal 'presence' to be fused with learned ceremonial skill."<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, reflection on the Chinese experience of "*Li*" ought to broaden and enhance our appreciation of interior spiritual growth or, in Confucian terms, "self-cultivation".

## Confucian "*Li*"

Ceremonies identify a particular culture; these signs tell us who a people are and what they value and esteem. For the Confucian, *Li* meant "ritual" or "propriety" in a very generalized sense; Confucian rites of public worship and festivities were external celebrations designed to create a respectful state of mind within the worshipper. While thus reinforcing a fixed social order and a particular ideology, these celebrations could also be said to transform them in accord with that vision.<sup>2</sup> Yet the real value of *Li* should be sought in "the ordinary everyday life rather than in ceremonial activities".<sup>3</sup> The Chinese were far too in love with life in its totality to overestimate external rituals although they did view such rites as exercising a definite function. In order to properly understand external acts of *Li*, the internal dispositions of the worshipper, the man expressing *Li*, must be explored.

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1. Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius - The Secular As Sacred* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972), p. 8.

2. Lin Yu-tang, *The Wisdom of Confucius* (New York: Modern Library, 1938) p. 15.

3. Joseph Kitagawa, *Religions of the east* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960) p. 50.



Confucius once taught: "If a man is not humane (*jen*), what has he to do with ceremonies (*Li*)?"<sup>4</sup> Confucians do not distinguish between a sacred and secular realm; rather all of life seems "one, vast, spontaneous, and holy rite".<sup>5</sup> Whereas *Li* emphasizes a fixed external order, *jen* bids the worshipper become aware of his proper identity and precise function within this "oneness". Only a man completely appreciating his own nature (*hsing*) in all its dimensions is fit to manifest *Li*; externally only such a man will know how to perform rituals of public worship properly, express the ceremonies and signs of human conduct, politeness, and courtesy, and convey the emotions which correspond to the particular needs of his fellowman. All this falls within the scope of Confucian *Li*. External acts of *Li* then must flow from the worshipper's perceived inner dispositions of humaneness (*jen*). Yet, how is the individual to discover these inner dispositions? How is he to become aware of the "sacredness" of the total meaning of his humanity?

The Confucian answer is for man to realize the experience of *ch'eng* (authenticity, sincerity), an all-encompassing meta-virtue. The Chinese character for *ch'eng* means pure and guileless: that which is free from all deception and duplicity. Authenticity and sincerity, the most common translations of *ch'eng*, offer the model of a sage, an individual so finely attuned and so aware of his function within life that he automatically responds and witnesses to this "oneness". Every act of the sage spontaneously celebrates the profound joy of "one, vast, spontaneous, and holy rite." While *Li* may specify precise external acts to be performed, *ch'eng* is the necessary internal prerequisite for such "acts" to be effective. *Ch'eng* bids each individual discover and proclaim his deepest identity; perfect authenticity demands that man establish his true identity within himself, in his relationship to the total human community, and beyond even that, his ontological identity with both the cosmic and divine orders. Accordingly, *ch'eng* challenges man to become conscious of his unique individual center (*hsing*), the social demands of family and human society, as well as the transcendental implications of his precise function or role within the total scheme of life. Only one who realizes all these

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4. *Lun Yu* 3: 3.

5. Fingarette, *Confucius*, pp. 1-18.



"identities" can be, according to the Confucians, a genuine, true, and authentic man; to fail to realize even one of these dimensions is to be less than authentic, less than a human being - and thus incapable of performing *Li* correctly.

Yet neither man nor society nor the "oneness" is fixed or static or complete; rather all are self-perfecting and profoundly orientated in the direction of development. Within such an overarching frame, man need only respond to his inner-most drives or promptings, his nature (*hsing*); his greatest need is sensitivity to such dynamic inner promptings as inspirations to be cultivated and tested in "acts"; consciousness of the multiple dimensions of identity and response to them provide the key to such "self-cultivation". Development of authenticity (*ch'eng*) demands that man pass through a dialectical process of increasing self-realization or growing consciousness; *Li* strives to intensify and clarify "consciousness" searching for authentic identification. Gradually, initial naive self-identity yields to deeper and more elevating identities. Man gradually discovers the richness of his individual, social, and transcendental dimensions. Spiritual learning, the classic quest for the "lost mind", points to the disciplined effort at "self-cultivation" needed to overcome moments of self-alienation. The cause for any failure must be sought within. Man will fully discover whom he is when his external actions correspond to his dynamic inner core and spontaneously flow from it. Indeed acts, both internal and external, may be said to be authentic only when they spontaneously, automatically, and joyously flow from this inner dynamism or center. For the Confucian, only such fully human authentic acts of man are fit for the celebration of *Li*.

One who attains this "authentic identification" attains also the power of transforming; he enters into the creative dynamics of the Universe.

The person with supreme authenticity can completely fulfill his own nature; perfecting his own nature, he can perfect the natures of other men. Able to perfect the natures of other men, he can bring about



the perfection of the natures of living beings and all other things. Able to do this, he is able to participate in transforming and nourishing forces of heaven and earth. Able to assist in such transforming powers, *he forms a trinity with heaven and earth.*

Creative dynamism thus characterizes the Confucian sage. He is the liturgist who has discovered his authentic center; therefore his every "act" is simultaneously world-transforming. Not only do such "acts" fulfil his own nature; they also "perfect the natures of other men" thereby binding together the human community. Perfecting society, the sage is thus able to participate in the very process of "transforming heaven and earth". Every "act" of his is "one, vast, spontaneous and holy rite" celebrating the deep joy of life-affirmation. Whatever flows from him contributes to the dynamic process of "spiritual growth and cultivation", to the continuous transformation of the total "oneness"

However, not all Chinese are 'sages'. Many, in fact, seem far from duplicating this inspiring model in their own lives. Yet all are invited to practice *Li*. For the pilgrim soul, journeying on the path to "self-cultivation", *Li* are designed to elevate consciousness. *Li* remind man of his multiple "identities", of his individual, social, and transcendental dimensions. They bid him stretch forth to an ever-increasing appreciation of himself. They are a concrete challenge to the disciplined purgative of "self-critique", to a dialectical process of searching for the "lost mind". In proportion to man's discovery of the hidden depths of his deepest nature, Confucian *Li* becomes effective in transforming man, community, and even "heaven and earth".

### Christian "Li"

Contemporary liturgists who reflect on the Chinese experience of *Li* are immediately struck by the broad and deep significance of ritual acts. Not only may individual "rites" never be reduced to external performances of "acts", no matter how ceremonially skilled or ritually perfect or even pious such words, thoughts, or music may appear to be; rather acts of "*Li*" must always be a challenge to the worshipper to interior spiritual growth and genuine 'self-cultivation'. They must stimulate a



profound search for the richness of man's meaning and identity, for the discovery of man's authentic nature and identification within the totality of existence. Moreover, rites testify to the affirmation of a definite ontological or theological vision and a commitment to it.

Accordingly a Christian designer of liturgy must be keenly aware of the values and vision he is striving to "incarnate". For the Christian, humanity (*jen*) and authenticity (*ch'eng*) are ultimately situated in man's Christic-center, the "open-spirit incarnate". A Christian gathering for the celebration of a Christian feast or festival, or, indeed, the Christian celebration of any event, must therefore create and provide multiple opportunities for growth and cultivation in the realization of such Christian values. If love, inspired by Jesus Christ's love for man and the world, be the supreme Christian value, then Christian liturgies, Christian *li*, must create and build into their "rites" real possibilities for the affirmation, expression, and attainment of love. Commitment to man and a Christian society demands multiple opportunities for such affirmation, expression, and realization. Authentically Christian "rites" must inspire man's discovery of his own unique center within the context of a positive Christian affirmation of life, love, and community grounded in the present, linked to the past, and thrust toward the future. Christian piety makes most sense in the genuine "acts" of love it extends and brings to others: by this very extension, Christian worship attains authenticity (*ch'eng*). Yet it is precisely here that Christian *li* uncover, their deepest roots in Jesus Christ, the foundation, inspirer, and initial designer of liturgy.

Once these genuine roots have been appreciated, the major thrust of Christian *li*, however, must be towards the future. Life-affirmation means assent not only to life that has been, or is currently being experienced; affirmation also implies aspirations to create the future. Accordingly Christian love will seek to elevate the community and inspire it to reach out for that which is beyond even the social community of fellowship and brotherhood, to guide itself to that transforming spiritual value of Love which surpasses all human understanding and comprehension. Christian *li* must create and design "rites" which move man, the community, and even the cosmos in the direction of that transforming goal. It is in this way that a Christian designer of liturgy can "make holy" even that which is not yet so.



All these values are at stake in the celebration of *li*. Worshipers must become conscious of, and attuned to, their "identities" and vocations as unique individual centers, as members of a loving community witnessing to clearly expressed theological values, and as dynamic creators of the future. Authentic liturgies must inspire all these values. To assist in their "preaching", Confucian liturgists invoked the model of a Perfect Sage as the exemplar of correct *li*. Being totally and completely authentic in the deepest meaning of *ch'eng*, the Sage is able to "fulfill his own nature", "perfect the natures of others", and "participate in the transformation of heaven and earth". Christian liturgists have their model of inspiration in Jesus Christ who fulfilled the role of a Confucian Sage and further specified the goal of spiritual "self-cultivation" as transforming love. Jesus Christ, the Christian Sage, prescribed self-emptying love (*kenosis*) as the formula for transformation. Christian *li* must therefore enable worshippers to discover within the depths of their own natures a nexus with Jesus Christ which thrusts them in the Confucian direction of "perfecting the natures of others" and even towards the very "transformation of heaven and earth". The transformative power of Christian *li* is the pneumatic Christ. While every sacrament is a joyous celebration of Love, it is also the transformation of whatever is touched by that "rite". Only when such transformative "acts" of love flow spontaneously from man's dynamic center, when the disciplined self-correctives of transforming "spiritual cultivation" prove effective, can Christian liturgists boast of the designing authentic "rites". Only then will the "ceremonies" of the Christian spontaneously automatically, and joyfully celebrate that "one, vast, spontaneous and holy rite" of perfect *li*. Until such time, however designers of liturgy must strive towards the creation of such "rites" as move clearly in this transforming direction. The patience, time, and effort needed to create correct *li* is perhaps best exemplified by Confucius himself.

At fifteen I set my mind on learning. At thirty I was well established. At forty I had no doubts. At fifty I understood the decrees of heaven. At sixty my ears were responsive. At seventy I simply followed my heart's desire.<sup>7</sup>

Disciplined struggle for "total self-identification" is the prerequisite for correct *li*, whether these "rites" be Confucian or Christian. Designers of *li* must inspire "liturgies" which yield such "self-discovery".

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7. *Lun-Yu* 2: 4.



# Festivals and their Significance

## Some Reflections on Festivals in Tamil Nadu

Festivals are the best expressions of the religious life of human groups. No one celebrates a festival alone. An individual may engage in ascetic practices, utilize techniques of prayer, perform rituals of various kinds, and even work up his religious emotions all by himself. But a community is needed for a festival. An individual may practise his religion in any place and at any time he chooses. But festivals follow a calendar of sacred and / or cosmic time and are associated with holy places. They are linked to the seasonal cycles of nature and the primordial events of a history of salvation. We cannot understand the significance of festivals and the role they play in the life of the community celebrating them unless we take into account all these different dimensions. For instance, *Diwali* is a festival of light. But a simple analysis of the symbolism of light and darkness and of the victory of light over darkness is far from adequate to appreciate the full significance of the festival. We will have to ask further questions like: Why at this time of the year? How is it celebrated? In which parts of the country? What are the special community events associated with it? etc. etc. *Ganesh Caturthi* is not celebrated with the same gusto in U. P. as in Maharashtra. *Puja* for the Bengalis is not of the same significance as *Dusserah* for the rest of the country, though they are celebrated at the same time. Though both *Onam* and *Pongal* are agricultural harvest thanksgiving feasts, the first is celebrated in September and the second in January.

It is in these different dimensions – religious, sociological, seasonal, regional – that this article reflects on the festivals of Tamil Nadu. For the sake of a certain homogeneity the discussion is limited to Hindu festivals. From the reflections a general typology for the analysis of the significance of festivals may arise.



## Types of festivals

If we look through the yearly cycle of festivals of Tamil Nadu we can discern four types: some belong to the Hindu-Sanskritic tradition and are celebrated all over the land though with varying degrees of solemnity; others are closely related to the seasonal conditions of the region; a third group consists of special celebrations in particular sacred places like Palani, which offer an occasion for pilgrimages, and these are really mobile festivals. Lastly we have the village annual festival that takes precedence over everything else as far as the villagers are concerned. Let us look at these different types of festivals a little more closely.

*Janmasthami*, *Dusserah*, *Mahaśivaratri*, *Diwali* may be said to be the major festivals celebrated all over the country, though their significance changes from place to place. They belong to the Hindu-Sanskritic tradition. This means that in Tamil Nadu they are celebrated mostly by the Sanskritized middle and upper classes. They are not of the same significance to the villagers, though an observance of them may become a necessity in the process of upward social mobility. *Janmasthami* celebrates the birth of Krishna. The story of Krishna is evoked through musical discourses, and through dance dramas and other rituals. *Mahaśivratri* is sacred to Siva, kept with an all-night vigil coupled with fasting, waiting for the liberating visit of Siva. This is celebrated elaborately in areas where Saivism is strong, like Kashmir. *Dusserah* is celebrated in north India to commemorate the victory of Rama over Ravana. It is the feast of the Devi, the divine Mother in Bengal and becomes the Durgapuja there. At the same time the *navagrahas* are honoured in Trivandrum. It is a state festival in Mysore. In Tamil Nadu the three goddesses of wealth (*Lakṣmi*), of power (*Parvati*) and of wisdom (*Sarasvati*) are honoured; it is also an occasion for social visits and exchanges. *Diwali* is a festival of liberation, symbolized by light. It is fast becoming a national, social festival losing a little of its religious connotation in the process. In Tamil Nadu the element of light is not important because it forms the principal element of the *Kartigai* festival a month later. *Diwali*, in Tamil Nadu, is rather known for its ritual bath, new clothes and crackers. These last have made it a children's festival. It would be clear, from the



foregoing examples, that even national festivals acquire regional overtones in the process of their celebration.

If anyone is asked about a typically Tamil festival the immediate response would be *Pongal*. It is the best known example of the group called seasonal festivals. *Pongal* is a harvest festival. It is a celebration of thanksgiving to whatever has contributed to the bountiful harvest. On the first day the newly-harvested rice is ceremonially cooked in milk and offered to the sun-god. *Pongal*, which is literally the boiling over of the rice, is a symbol of abundance. *Pongal* is also the occasion of a renewal of life. Houses are white-washed; new pots and pans are bought. The sharing of *pongāl* in communal banquet promotes a sense of fellowship and community. On the following day cows and bullocks are bathed, gaily painted and decorated with garlands, bells and cloth, and special *pongāl* prepared for them is offered to them. This is man's way of acknowledging the help rendered by them in his agricultural work. *Pongāl* is a harvest festival, and the time of its celebration is fixed, not arbitrarily but by the yearly fact of the harvest in early January.

Two other festivals that are peculiar to Tamil Nadu are *Kartigai* and *Adi Padhinettu*. *Kartigai* is the Tamil Nadu festival of light. It probably marks the end of the north-eastern monsoon in November-December. Bon-fires are made all over, especially on hilltops. Temples and houses are decorated with little lamps. This feast is celebrated with particular solemnity in Tiruvannamali where Siva is supposed to have appeared as a Pillar of fire. *Adi Padhinettu*, or the 18th day of the month of *Adi*, celebrates the flood waters in Tamil Nadu rivers, especially the Kaveri. This is the result of the south-western monsoon and indicates the time of sowing. Ritual baths and the floating of lamps in the river mark the festival.

The month of *Margazhi* (December - January) is kept as a time of prayer and penance. It is the coldest season of the year. Small groups go round the streets singing bhajans early in the morning inviting people for worship. This practice is being replaced unfortunately by loud speakers blaring sacred music at 4. 00 in the morning at every street corner. Another recent development that runs counter to this spirit is the annual



cultural festival that dominates life for two weeks, especially in the city of Madras, during the Christmas holidays. The period of rigorous ascetic preparation demanded from pilgrims to the shrine of Lord Ayyappa in Sabarimalai, Kerala, also falls in this month.

Festivals of a third type are those which are observed everywhere but celebrated with greater solemnity in a shrine which then becomes the goal of large crowds of pilgrims. The Citrai festival (April) at Madurai, celebrating the marriage of Meenakshi and Sundareswar draws huge crowds. *Vaikaṣi Vaiśakam* (April-May), *Thai-Poosam* (January-February) and *Punguni Uttiram* (March-April) are festivals connected with Lord Muruga and attracts hosts of pilgrims to his sanctuaries at Palani Tiruchendur, Tiruttani etc. The *Vaikunṭa Ekadaśi* festival brings lots of Vaishnavites to Srirangam in December-January. The exact occasion of these festivals, the myth behind them and even the time of the year, are secondary, though not unimportant. What is important is the affirmation of special sacred places where God becomes present to man, to reveal himself to him, to relieve him of his misery and to save him. It is significant that almost all these festivals are associated with the days of the full moon, symbol of fulness and joy.

For a villager the festival in which the local deity, whatever it be, is honoured is the feast [of the year. All the constitutive elements that mark a festival are grouped around this event in the village community. Other festivals may be kept. But they are not really solemnized. It would be interesting to analyse the time at which these village feasts take place. Without an attempt at a complete survey it may be said that March-April and September-October are the festival seasons. It is significant that these are the periods of the year when Tamil Nadu enjoys a temperate climate, when it is neither warm nor chill. They are also the occasions when the farmers are comparatively free from their labours in the field. With increasing industrialization and urbanization, and the corresponding loss of roots in the soil, these factors may become secondary.



### What makes a festival ?

No detailed information on ceremonies and symbols was given in the list of festivals above because there would have been a lot of repetition. For example, *Onam* in Kerala is celebrated in September and *Pongal* is celebrated in Tamil Nadu in January. There would certainly be some cultural differences. But apart from them both are harvest festivals; both are occasions for family reunions and rejoicing; both celebrate new life; both involve elaborate cultural programmes. The elements that go to make up the feast are largely the same as also their basic significance. Cultural and religious variations expressed in the myths may be different. But it is always a victory of good over evil, of light over darkness, of life over death etc. Similarly the *Ganesh Caturthi* in Maharashtra is not the same as the *Durga Puja* in Bengal. Yet, apart from the deities worshipped, the sociological manifestations and experience are basically similar. For this reason a general analysis of the various elements that go to make a festival would be more interesting than a list of ceremonies of each celebration.

A festival is an occasion for a *celebration*. It is an affirmation, in joy and freedom, of all the values that the community holds dear. It is the creative self expression of the community's being and life. During a festival the community forgets, for a moment, its daily routine of productive, mundane, humdrum activity. Man's imagination is released from its usual subjection to practical reason. The liberated fancy is rich in the creative production of joy and freedom. This freedom sometimes leads to excess. But this is overlooked. In this atmosphere of freedom man becomes aware of dimensions to his life, to which he does not usually pay attention. He becomes conscious of his unity with, and at the same time dependence on, the gods, manifested as thanksgiving and prayer. He is aware of his communion with nature, which has been kind to him in a bountiful harvest, or which is smiling upon him after a refreshing monsoon, in the soft, sweet light of the glorious full moon. He appreciates the collaboration even of dumb animals, as manifested, for instance, in the festival of *Pongal*. He is aware of his fellowship with the community, of kinship, of the village, of his work. And he expresses his awareness in banquets. Gifts are exchanged. Mutual



visits are paid. He experiences and expresses all this not merely as an individual, but as a community, in all sorts of creative ways, in song and dance, in processions, in sharing and fellowship. Two of these aspects, namely community and creativity, should be noted in particular.

The ideal of *community* finds expression in a festival in a variety of ways. In India where family and kinship ties are very strong, a village festival is always an occasion for the reunion not only of the family but also of relations and friends. During the festival the co-operative spirit of each one fulfilling his or her role for the success of celebrations is evident. Going beyond this there would even be a levelling of social structures and stratifications resulting in a sense of comradeship and equality that would not be thinkable in the work-a-day world. In the joy of the Lord there are no rich and poor, powerful and weak.

Another element that comes to the fore is *creativity*. Song and dance and drama have always been part of any celebration. They may not be of a highly developed kind, but they are spontaneous. The traditional arts have originated and grown in this way. Even to-day it is thanks to the festivals that many folk-dance traditions like *kummi*, *kolattam*, *oyil kummi*, the *kavadi* dance, the *karakam* dance, *puravi attam* and *pavaikuttu* are preserved in Tamil Nadu. The village or temple festival even today is also the occasion for musical concerts, dance dramas, sacred plays and gatherings of poets. In this way leisure is spent in a creative manner to produce an atmosphere of joy and exaltation.

The festival is also a time of *renewal*. In a very material sense the houses are cleaned and white-washed. New clothes are bought. It is a period of rest and relaxation in between periods of hard work. Bodily strength as well as mental power is renewed. This renewal is often linked to cosmic phenomena: the renewal of life in spring and the new beginning of life and abundance indicated by a harvest. The myths which correspond to the festivals often bring home the idea 'of a new life, victorious over some manifestation of death and destruction.'

Above all a festival is a time of *religious renewal*. It is never, in Tamil Nadu, a merely social phenomenon. It is always



linked to holy days, holy places, holy events. In a festival the community affirms not only its life but also its faith. Festivals are often preceded by days of penance and fasting. The festivals themselves revolve round the temple and demonstrate the fellowship of man with God, whose concern and love for man is shown by his liberating presence and by the manifestation of his favour in natural phenomena like spring, harvest etc. Thus the festivals seem to reaffirm religious faith.

In Tamil Nadu this re-affirmation is helped by *organized programmes of religious instruction*. The cultural programmes – dance, music and drama – have normally religious themes, usually taken from the scriptures and the puranas. This is often supplemented by musical discourses like *kalakṣepams*, *harikathas*, or themes drawn from the epics. A series of lectures expounding the scriptures like the *Bhagavata purana*, *Mahabharatha*, *Kandapurānam* are also common. Recently a new genre of religious discourse on a moral theme with special reference to the habits and circumstances of modern times is also becoming popular. Bhajan services nourish emotional fervour. Thus festivals provide an occasion for serious religious instruction, but in an easy and acceptable and at the same time most effective manner since the media used are not merely words but images, stories, music and dance. During the *Vaikunta Ekadāṣi* festival in Srirangam, for example, all the 4000 verses of the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* the scriptures of the Vaishnavites, are recited.

As has already been remarked all these elements that go to make up the festival do not take place at the same time everywhere. They form a pattern that is repeated with local variations in every festival of some importance. This means that in speaking of festivals we cannot be satisfied with the one element that makes it different from all others because it is specific to it whether it is a special myth or ritual or symbol. The various dimensions of the festival have to be analysed. Only such an analysis will help us to understand the role festivals play in the life of the people.



### Common symbols

It has been said earlier that there are some common symbols repeated in various forms and under various circumstances in different festivals. Some of them will be pointed out now. The word 'symbol' is used here in a very broad sense. It may be an object: light or water; it may be an action: bathing, burning, sharing; it may simply be a narration of a primordial event that makes it present again; it may further be a theme that is implied in a particular type of celebration.

The first symbolic value worth stressing is a *sense of presence and of fellowship with the transcendent*. This is expressed in terms of myths, that are presented in ritual. It is manifested in an attitude of praise and thanksgiving, as at *Pongal*. It also appears in the prayer and penance of the month of *Margazhi*. The sacred places and times at which the festivals are celebrated often indicate a sense of special presence, of intervention in history, of here and now. Shorn of this religious element the festivals of Tamil Nadu would lose their special character.

Another symbolic element that comes through constantly in the celebrations is a sense of *harmony with nature*. The spring is a universal symbol of new life. The use of full-moon days, and of the temperate months, and the link with the yearly monsoon, betray an awareness of the importance of a 'natural' context for the manifestation of a festive mood. Festivals are also linked to the agricultural cycle of sowing and harvesting, especially as the harvest itself is a symbol of new life and creation and of abundance. The *Mattu-pongal* which honours also the non-human collaborators of man shows us that the South Indian saw God's bounty not only in the earth but also in his creatures. The cow as a symbol of plenty is known all over India. The bull as a fertility symbol, as the mount of Siva, is also known. But the honouring of the bull in the context of the harvest is rather peculiar to South India.

The theme of life, of *new life*, is often evoked in the festivals. In feasts connected with the agricultural and seasonal cycles of nature this is very clear. It is also very clear in the different uses of the food symbol. The festival of *pongal* is a case in point. The new harvest is really a gift of food that sustains life.



Food in the form of *naivedya* forms part of all puja rituals. The new life is often affirmed in itself as in spring and harvest festivals. It is rarely contrasted with death or symbols of death. The theme of new life is also manifested in the putting on of new clothes. This is often preceded by a ritual bath which is an obvious and universal symbol not only of purification (newness) but of life. This newness is often made to extend to the surroundings: the utensils one uses, the house, the temple.

The theme of *community among men* is affirmed through many symbols. The banquet is the most obvious example. Exchange of gifts and greetings as at *pongol*, mutual visits as at *navaratri*, and the celebration in common of the feast itself is a symbolic experience and affirmation of this sense of fellowship. The free feeding of the poor is often interpreted as a gesture of pity or of reparation. At its time of observance the festival can simply be a sharing of joy and a celebration of fellowship with all.

One important theme that occurs repeatedly in Indian festivals is that of the *conflict between good and evil* and *the ultimate victory of the good*. Often the conflict itself is dramatically depicted as for instance, when Rama and Ravana clash during the *Dusserah* in North India. Often it is the victory that is celebrated: the victory of Rama over Ravana, the victory of Durga over the buffalo demon, the victory of Vishnu's various incarnations over *asuras* celebrated in *Diwali*, *Onam* etc., the victory over the self through penance as in *Mahaśivaratri*, the victory of Ganesh over all obstacles etc. etc. This theme of conflict and victory is very often symbolized in terms of light and darkness. This is most obvious in *Diwali*, but is also present in *Onam* and in *Kartigai Deepam*.

From the theme of the victory of good over evil it is only one step to the theme of *liberation - salvation*. For the conflict between good and evil is a cosmic one, and the victory of the good is to be shared by all. Krishna and Rama are essentially saviour gods; so are Durga and Siva in their own way. The stories of the *Nayanmars*, or devotees of Siva, in Tamil Nadu, offer instances of the *lilās* of Siva in protecting and offering salvation to his devotees.



Salvation – liberation leads to union with the Lord. The theme of *union*, especially interpreted in the *nayaka-nayaki bhava*, is a popular one. It is noteworthy, for instance, that marriage is a frequent theme of *Harikāthas: Rukmini Kalyanam, Sita Kalyanam. Meenakshi Kalyanam* etc. The famous *citrai* festival of Madurai is a celebration of the marriage between Meenakshi and Sundareswar (manifestations of Parvathi and Siva). Identification of oneself with the female partner in such unions is a commonplace in bhakti poetry and hence familiar to most devotees. The child-gods Muruga and Balakrishna can call up parental type emotions and the experience of union can be very intense. The possibility of such union also brings with it a sense of unworthiness and a desire to surrender oneself completely. This explains a lot of rituals, connected especially with pilgrimages. These are often prepared with fasts, abstinence from sex and other austerities. The preparation for the pilgrimage to Sabarimalai is the best known case of penance in South India. At the shrine itself self-surrender is symbolized in a variety of ways: material offerings, ex-votos, shaving of one's head, service over a certain period, etc.

The actual material symbols used to indicate themes in a practical way are quite secondary. These may vary from place to place or according to circumstances. We must be careful not to interpret these material symbols in an isolated manner, out of the socio-religious context of the celebration of which they form part.

## Conclusion

Growing industrialization, urbanization and modernization are adding a new variable to the various elements described as constituting a festival. People seem to be losing slowly the sense of harmony with nature. Festivals like *Diwali* and *Pongal* are getting more and more secularized. People seem to become less creative: folk-dancing, etc. are left to slowly disappearing professional troupes. There is not sufficient leisure to enjoy a festival season calmly. All these changes might lead to shifts of emphasis. New kind of symbols might replace old ones. But the basic need of men for festivals would remain. And the great themes of love and life, of community and transcendence, of thanksgiving and prayer, would still require suitable festivals to express them.

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# The Evolution of the Feasts of the Roman Rites

Among the many elements that characterize a feast day, a break from normal life, which enables us to enjoy the benefits of life and nature, is certainly an important one<sup>1</sup>. This break is effected in various ways: by returning to a sacred era, a mythical age, when human existence was in a state of bliss owing to a perfect communion between God and men<sup>2</sup>, by the re-enactment of the saving intervention of God in the history of the people<sup>3</sup>, by the appearance of God in the midst of the people<sup>4</sup>, by a ritual celebration of all these in order to give a deep experience to the participating community. To Christians the concept of a feast had a significance that was somewhat different. Paul tells the Colossians: "from now onwards, never let anyone else decide ... whether you are to observe annual festivals, New Moons or Sabbaths. These were only pale reflections of what was coming: the reality is Christ"<sup>5</sup>. And again to the Corinthians: 'Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed; let us celebrate the feast, then, by getting rid of all the old yeast of evil and wickedness, having only the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth'<sup>6</sup>. The centre of the feast is no more myth or history, but the person of Christ and the manner of celebration is no more mere ritual but mutual communion of mind and heart. However, this new concept of a feast must not be taken as in opposition to, and as a total break from, the non-Christian understanding of feasts described earlier. The Person of Christ around whom the celebration takes place is the risen Lord, who by His Death

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1. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 5, pg. 865 ff.

2) O. CASEL, *The Mystery of Christian Worship*, London 1963. pg. 53.

3. ROLAND DE VAUX, *Ancient Israel*, London 1965 pg. 492.

4. KAMPMAN, *Year of the Church*, London 1966, pg. 17. 5, Col. 2, 16-17.

6. 1 Cor. 5, 7-8.



and Resurrection fulfilled the human aspirations for escape from the monotony of daily life, on the one hand, and communion with the divine, on the other. The Resurrection is an event of cosmic transformation by the definite and irrevocable intervention of God in human history realized in the person of Christ who appears in the midst of His people as the Lord and Saviour whenever a Christian celebration takes place. From this it is clear that the origin and meaning of Christian feasts is the resurrection of the Lord; that is why the nucleus of the Christian celebration of festivals is made up of Sunday, the weekly Pasch, and Easter, the annual Pasch.

The purpose of the proclamation is the Lordship of Christ, the power of whose resurrection is continually liberating man from the boredom of this world of sin. Hence every human celebration must be given this Christic dimension in order to make it a real break from the arduous tasks of life and a genuine communion with the divine.

The aim of this article is to show the Christo-centric character of feasts in the Roman liturgy (and in this process it will have to be shown also how this was lost, to some extent, in the course of centuries) and its relevance to the social celebrations of today

## **1. The main elements of the liturgical celebration of a feast**

The centre of every Christian celebration, as already seen, is the risen Lord. To a Christian every festival is essentially connected with the event of His resurrection, which abolished the old Pasch and all the other celebrations and became the only real event of the appearance of God in the midst of men. Thus when Christians celebrate festivals, they re-live this event in all its richness. Hence every Christian celebration has the following characteristics :

a) It is a memorial, a recalling and re-living of the event, of God's intervention in history. That is why the feasts of the Church in earliest times, commemorated anniversaries of the death of the saints and not any particular mystery of faith as they



today, e. g. the feast of the Holy Trinity. The Sunday and the Easter celebrations were commemoration of the event of the resurrection. Every such celebration was considered as a re-enactment of the original event<sup>7</sup>.

b) This memorial is made real by the celebration of the Eucharist. The proclamation of the event which is the concrete way in which the memorial is made, becomes effective in the Eucharistic celebration.<sup>8</sup> That is why the Eucharist becomes the central event of every feast.

c) The feast is always a celebration of the community. It is a solemn and joyful coming together of the community, in the midst of whom the event they commemorate becomes real. The Christian festival is a moment of deep experience for the community that celebrates it. The event is re-enacted, and the community re-lives it, in involving itself in the celebration.

d) The devotional element is a renewed commitment to God who has entered into the life of the people. The Christian celebration answers the demand of the prophet to the people to make their offering consist of dedicated and living service instead of incense and offerings made with hands soiled with injustice<sup>9</sup>.

e) The Christian celebration is also marked by a sense of expectation. The eschatological character is very conspicuous in the celebration of liturgical feasts<sup>10</sup>.

f) A deep atmosphere of joy pervades the whole celebration as a consequence of the renewed awareness of the presence of the Spirit of the risen Christ in the community that celebrate the feast. This joy is the outcome of a presence that is effectively realized between God and man, and between man and man, in the person of the risen Lord, who is the centre of every Christian celebration.

These characteristics were usually present in the celebrations of the early Church as is evident from the sacramentaries and

7. PACIFICO MASSI, *La Domenica*, Napoli 1967, pg. 37 ff

8. O. CASEI, *Hodie*, Maison Dieu 65 (1961) 127-132

9. Is, 1, 13-16. Cfr. Amos, 5, 21; Hos. 2, 13; Mal. 1, 13.

10. Liturgical Constitution, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 8



other liturgical evidence that have come down to us<sup>11</sup>. In the later period, especially in the Middle Ages, there was a noticeable change in the focal point of Christian celebrations :

The memorial character with its element of personal presence gave place to an abstract commemoration of a mystery, meant to satisfy certain doctrinal or pietistic needs of the faithful. Together with this, the cosmic dimension of Christian celebration also gave place to a mere apologetic justification of the mystery that was celebrated. The historical evolution of the feasts in the Roman Liturgy is now examined to show how this happened.

## 2. Evolution of feasts in the Roman Church

The primitive liturgical calendar was marked by extreme simplicity. The Paschal and the eschatological character of Christian faith in the first centuries made the community celebrate only the great event of the Resurrection once every year (Pasch - Easter), and once every week (Sunday)<sup>12</sup>. This was the state of the calendar till almost the middle of the third century. Of course the feast of Pentecost was also celebrated from very early times, because this and the Resurrection, as it were, constituted only one event. The celebrations of saints was almost exclusively restricted to the commemorations of the death anniversaries of martyrs celebrated at their tombs<sup>13</sup>. We can also see the stress on the paschal character of these festivities because the martyr was the best witness of the risen Lord.

The development of the other feasts in the liturgical calendar was influenced by the following facts:

- i) the religious environment in which the Christian community was living;
- ii) the definitions of Councils and Synods;
- iii) the mutual influence of one church on the others;
- iv) devotions and practices of powerful groups in the

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11. ARNALDO PERNIGOTTO-CEGO, OSB, *Cos'è la festa cristiana?* Eph. Lit. 87 (1973) I-II, 75 ff.

12. J. JUNGSMANN, *The early Liturgy*, London 1963 pg. 19ff.

13. Ibidem, pg. 176ff.



Church, such as the religious communities. Along these main lines the various feasts of the Roman Church historically developed.

### A. The Easter cycle

The Church took over the two great feasts of Passover and Pentecost from the Jewish practice from very early times. The oldest account of a Christian Paschal feast takes us back to the apostolic period. According to Irenaeus, Polycarp of Smyrna affirmed that he had personally celebrated the Paschal feast with John and other apostles<sup>14</sup>. In the second and third centuries, the celebration of Easter took place at night and the culmination of the festivity was Baptism and the Eucharist<sup>15</sup>. Since the sacraments of initiation were connected with the Easter festivities, a period of preparation was prescribed for the catechumens. Later on this developed into Lent<sup>16</sup> and became a time of preparation of the whole Church for Easter. The Paschal Triduum, i. e. the celebration of Easter during three days - Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday, - was introduced in the fourth century. This had its beginning in Jerusalem where Christians celebrated the events of the last days of Christ's life in the very places where they had taken place<sup>17</sup>. The pilgrim who went to the Holy land later on introduced these celebrations in their local churches and thus we have the rites of Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday and Good Friday, which dramatically represent the events of the Passion and Death of Christ. The feasts of Eastertide, especially the Ascension have a similar origin. In the very early period there was no such special feast as the Ascension. It was celebrated as a mystery one with the resurrection. It became a separate feast only in the fourth century, together with Holy Week, introduced into the West from Jerusalem through the initiative of pilgrims<sup>18</sup>.

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14. EUSEBIUS, *Hist. Eccl.* V, 24, 16

15. B. BOTTE (ed.) *La Tradition Apostolique de Sainte Hipo-lyte*, Munster Westfalen 1965, pg. 42 ff.

16. GREGORY DIX, *The shape of the Liturgy*, London 1964, pg. 353 ff.

17. AEAT. FRANCESCHINI ET WEBER, (Edit.) *Itinerarium Ageriae*, Tournai

18. Ibidem 1958



Pentecost was the culmination of the Easter celebrations because it completed the mystery of the Resurrection by celebrating the descent of the Holy Spirit on the disciples, as the gift of the risen Lord. The early Church had maintained a close relationship between Easter and Pentecost. When this was lost sight of, owing to a trinitarian theology that was more theocentric than Christocentric, Pentecost came to be considered a feast in honour of the Holy Spirit.

The following process of evolution in the understanding of the feast of Easter becomes noticeable as we go through its liturgical transformation. In the beginning the whole interest was in the event of the Resurrection. It was celebrated as an encounter between the risen Christ and Christians: the celebrations of Baptism and Eucharist highlighted the whole feast and thus illustrated this theme in a very clear and realistic manner. Gradually the interest shifted from *the* event to the events: Easter became the celebration of many events taken separately: Maundy Thursday celebrated the Last Supper, Good Friday, the Passion and Death, Holy Saturday, the burial (hence no liturgical celebration takes place on that day) and Easter Sunday, the Resurrection. This fragmentation destroyed the unity of the event and as a consequence the celebration became more pietistic and devotional than anamnestic and sacramental. The new rites of Easter according to the reformed Roman liturgy has brought back this unity once again. It is very clearly stated that the whole of the Paschal Triduum celebrates one mystery, one event: Christ's Death and Resurrection. The celebrations of the various days only highlight particular aspects of the same event and mystery. Thus, Maundy Thursday puts in relief the triumph of Christ's love under the sign of the friendly meal. On Good Friday, the same is manifested through the sign of His death on the Cross. On Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday it becomes evident in His re-appearance in the midst of His disciples (resurrection). It is for this reason that the new rites of Holy Week clearly state that Lent comes to a close, and Easter celebrations begin, with the mass of Maundy Thursday.<sup>19</sup>

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19. *Calendarium Romanum ex decreto sacrosancti oecumenici concilii Vaticani II instauratum auctoritate Pauli PP. VI promulgatum*, Vatican 1969 n. 19. 28-



The new liturgical calendar has also given Pentecost its rightful place as the culmination of the Easter celebrations by removing the octave of Pentecost and thus closing the Easter season with the feast of Pentecost. This clearly shows that it is an integral part of the Easter celebrations.

## B. The Christmas cycle

The Christmas cycle with the feasts of Nativity and Epiphany has its origin in the fourth century. According to scholars there are several possible reasons for the creation of these festivals:

### a) The computation theory <sup>20</sup>

This is an attempt to justify the choice of December 25 as the day for the celebration of Christmas. Those who affirm the validity of this theory base their arguments on a document called 'De Solstitiis et aequinoctiis' (fourth century), where the conception and death of Christ are made to fall on March 25. As a consequence His birth has to take place on December 25 exactly nine months after the conception. The coincidence of the dates of conception and death was necessary because Christ, being a perfect man had to spend on earth a complete number of years and therefore if he died on March 25 he had to begin his earthly life (His conception) on the same date; consequently his birth had to be on December 25.

### b) The theory of the substitution of a pagan festival <sup>21</sup>

According to this theory, the feast of Christmas was the Christian reaction to the pagan festival of the 'Unconquerable Sun', which was celebrated on the occasion of Winter Solstice. This was a very popular feast in the third century, when the cult of the sun was strongly affirming itself in the Roman empire. It was celebrated in the West on December 25. The Church reacted to this pagan festival by instituting the feast in honour of the true 'Sun' Christ <sup>22</sup>.

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20. DUCHESNE, *Origines du culte chretien*, Paris 1898, pg. 247-254.

21. J. LEMARIE, *La manifestation du Seigneur* - Lex Orandi 23, Paris 1956

22. The Fathers of the Church bear witness to it. Cfr. ST. AUGUSTINE, *Sermo* 190, 1; 196, 1; P. L. 38, 1007, 1009. ST. LEO, *Sermo* 22, 6; 27, 4; P. L. 54, 198, 218-219.



c) The theory of Baumstark<sup>23</sup>

He holds that the great feasts of ancient Christianity are not commemorations of historical events but expressions of religious ideas. 'In its primitive meaning Christmas was the feast of the Nicene Dogma'<sup>24</sup>.

We have to accept the fact that none of these theories enjoy an absolute certainty. What we can say is only this: all these reasons might have well contributed to some extent to the institution of the feast. From a pastoral point of view we have clear evidence that the feast of Christmas was placed in opposition to the pagan feast referred to, as can be seen from the Christmas homilies of St. Augustine and St. Leo.<sup>25</sup>

Originally, Epiphany, celebrated on January 6, in the East, had a theme similar to the feast of December 25, in the West. The reason for the date was very similar to the fixing of the date of Christmas in Rome<sup>26</sup>. As a matter of fact, January 6, in Alexandria, was the same day as December 25, in Rome because the reformed Julian Calendar had not yet been accepted in Egypt. In Alexandria, in the temple of Kores, a feast was celebrated on the night between January 5 and 6 to celebrate the *original* birth of Aion and of the increase of light, marking the winter solstice. Cosmos, a disciple of St. Gregroy Nazianzen, speaks of this pagan festival and puts it in relation to the celebration of Christ's birth.<sup>27</sup>

In a later period we have Christmas and Epiphany as two separate feasts both in the West and in the East. This happened probably after the introduction of the Julian Calendar in Egypt, and as a consequence the feasts of Epiphany in the East and Christmas in the West fell on two different days. Following the law of mutual borrowing among Churches, the East introduced the feast of December 25, taking it from the West and celebrating it as the

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23. BAUMSTARK, *Comparative Liturgy*, London 1958, p. c; 152 ff.

24. *ibidem* pg. 162

25. Cfr. note 21.

26. BOTTE, *Les Origines de la Noel et de l' Epiphanie* (Louvain 1932, pg. 69-70

27. *Patrologia Greca*, Vol. 38, 464



day of Christ's birth, and kept January 6 as the day of Christ's manifestation to the world, especially through the reception of his Baptism in the Jordan. The West took instead the feast of January 6 and began to celebrate it as the day on which Christ made himself known to the world through the Magi.

In tracing the evolution of the Christmas cycle we have still to consider the origin of Advent. We find this season in the Roman Liturgy only from the sixth century. Probably it was introduced in imitation of the period of preparation that preceded Easter.

There is a very interesting aspect of Christological thinking in the course of centuries. The Christian community in the first centuries, was impressed by the Paschal character of Christianity. The details of Christ's life, such as his birth, infancy etc. did not interest it very much. The emphasis was shifted from the Resurrection to the Incarnation. This is very evident in the doctrinal controversies of fourth and fifth centuries. The liturgical life of the Church, following the principle 'Lex orandi', is very much affected by this changed theological perspective. This shift from the Resurrection to the Incarnation continues up to the modern period. With the liturgical renewal of Vatican II, a return to the Paschal dimension of Christian celebrations has begun. All the same it must be confessed that it has not yet sufficiently entered the life and practice of the pastors and people. This is clearly evident from the fact that popular devotion still strongly emphasizes the importance of Christmas over Easter, and even with regard to the celebration of Easter, the stress is more on the Passion than on the Resurrection. A well planned catechesis and liturgies that are meaningfully celebrated can give back the Paschal dimension of our Christianity. This is needed in a special way in the world of today in order to create the optimism which springs from Christian hope

### **3. The principles that govern the institution and celebration of Christian feasts**

The brief analysis that has been made, of the evolution of feasts in the Roman rite, invites reflection at a deeper level in

#### **28. Liturgical Constitution art. 2.**



order to discover those principles which can influence the institution and celebration of feasts even today. The Church is a living reality and therefore the manifestations of her life must continually acquire new forms in order that all the riches with which the risen Christ has endowed her might be brought to light. It is in this process that she becomes a sign lifted up among the nations<sup>28</sup>. The discovery of the principles which underlie this process of growth and manifestation will enable us to continue it even now.

#### a) Principle of evangelization

The Christian celebration is a memorial by proclamation. Its content is the core-reality of the Christian faith: the Death and Resurrection of Christ. This coincides with the evangelizing mission of the Church, namely to proclaim the mystery of Christ until He comes. However, it has to be noted that evangelization is mainly directed to non-Christians, while the celebration of feasts is an event that takes place within the community. Hence there is a difference in the purpose of proclamation at the level of evangelization and during the celebration of a feast. All the same the evangelizing role of a feast can be seen in the fact that the Christian community sent out to evangelize acquires a deeper experience of its faith through the celebration of the mystery and therefore can proclaim it in a more convincing and meaningful manner. It makes the Christian community become a better witness of the Death and Resurrection, and as a consequence the act of witnessing acquires a greater efficacy. The institution of the feasts of Christmas and Epiphany seems to have had this effect, at least as far as we can judge from the sermons of St. Augustine and St. Leo<sup>29</sup>.

#### b) The principle of authenticity

The Christian feasts are essentially a profession of the faith of the community celebrating specifically Christian values. The celebration of the divine maternity of Mary (formerly on October 13, now on January 1) is a typical example. It was originally celebrated as the feast of orthodoxy, the commemoration of the Council of Ephesus where this dogma was proclaimed. According

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29. Cfr. note 21.



to Baumstark the feast of Christmas in the West had a similar origin, namely, it was celebrated to glorify the dogma of the Council of Nicea. Since liturgical celebrations were moments of a solemn proclamation of faith, the celebration of a feast to commemorate a dogma was the clear sign of its acceptance by the community.

### c) The principle of involvement

We have celebrations in the Roman calendar that show the interest of the Church in the temporal life of the community. Ember days and Rogation days clearly bear witness to this. They were celebrations meant to show the involvement of the Church in the well-being of the community by imploring divine blessings on the faithful at a solemn celebration at the beginning of the various seasons. In modern times the Church has instituted the feast of St. Joseph the worker, for a similar reason.

### d) The principle of dialogue

The Church is a community that is open to the world. She must show this openness not only by entering into dialogue with the world on doctrinal matters but by sharing in the joys and sorrows of the world around her. "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age,... these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts".<sup>30</sup> Genuine dialogue consists in sharing the experience of others. One of the ways in which the Church fulfils this mission is by celebrating their feasts and thus interpreting the meaning of their joys and sorrows in the light of Christ's Death and Resurrection. This principle was not used much in the early Church. The reason may have been the different approach to non-Christian religions the early Church seems to have had. With the apologetic and defensive attitude of the early Church with regard to the religious reality there was much more dialogue with the philosophical world of the time), the application of the principle of dialogue with regard to non-Christian celebrations would naturally be more difficult. But today the situation has undergone a change and therefore we can look forward to a different approach.

30. Gaudium et Spes n. 1.



#### 4. Can we apply these principles today with regard to the indigenization of festivals?

This problem has to be looked at from two different points of view: first, the indigenization of Christian festivals, secondly, the Christian celebration of Indian festivals. The answer to the first is obvious in the light of the general trend towards liturgical inculturation. Besides, if the proclamation of the mystery has to be relevant and deeply experiential as has already been mentioned above, the celebration has to be conducted according to cultural patterns congenial to the people. What is more the principle of authenticity seems to demand such a procedure because the profession of faith in the mystery cannot be authentic unless it is performed through signs and symbols that fully convey the meaning of the mystery to the faithful. These have necessarily to be taken from the culture of the people.

With regard to the second, namely, the Christian celebration of Indian festivals, it seems to be demanded by the remaining two principles of involvement and dialogue. The festivities that celebrate natural events, such as harvesting the crops, are occasions of great rejoicing in the country. The Christian community cannot remain indifferent to such manifestations. They are events that affect all at a very deep human level and therefore the profound sense of human solidarity which characterizes the community of the disciples of Christ must be awakened with a Christian awareness and celebrated in the joy of the risen Lord. The various religious feasts of the country, too, are occasions which call for a dialogue, at deeper levels, between the Church and non-Christian religions. By entering into their religious experience, the Christian community will be able to enter into a meaningful dialogue with them. It will ultimately lead to a Christian interpretation as in the early Church with regard to some of the pagan feasts. Finally, we have the national feasts which celebrate the joys and hopes of a human community in their struggle towards the realization of progress and prosperity and of a respectable place in the comity of nations. The Church is living in the midst of such a community. Hence she has to enter into these movements and interpret these just aspirations in the light of the Paschal hope which fills her life and activity



in this world as she journeys towards the realization of the new earth and new heaven. By celebrating these national feasts she is fulfilling this mission of hers.

### Conclusion

The original nucleus of the Christian celebrations, the Resurrection of the Lord, has been unfolding itself in the course of centuries as the Church makes her pilgrimage through various cultural and geographical milieux. unfortunately she did not always succeed in presenting the glory of the Resurrection in the varied manifestations in which it could have been made visible during her pilgrimage. Today she is confronted with new challenges, as she meets, in her journey, the variety of cultures and religious manifestations of the modern world. She is invited to celebrate the feast in honour of the Lord also so that she may effectively proclaim His presence in the midst of the nations and thus hasten the day when all living things in creation will cry out: "The Lamb that was sacrificed is worthy to be given power, riches, wisdom, strength, honour, glory and blessing... To the one who is sitting on the throne and to the Lamb, be all praise, honour, glory and power, for ever and ever"<sup>31</sup>.

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31. Rev. 5, 12-14.



# Book Reviews

*Walbert Bühlmann \**

## THE COMING OF THE THIRD CHURCH

St Paul Publications, England, 1976 pp. XI + 419,

£ 4. 50

This is a book by a Capuchin missionary, a Swiss by nationality, who spent long years in the missions, especially in Africa, and gained first-hand impressions about the actual conditions and future possibilities of "the third Church", which is in fact the Church of the third world. The first Church is that of the East, the Oriental churches that mark the first stage in the expansion of the Church from Jerusalem. The present crisis in the Church is produced by the fact that the focus of its life is passing from the second Church, the Church of Europe and North America which took over control from the oriental Churches, to the young churches of Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania. Father Bühlmann examines the various aspects of this transition, its shocks, expectations and tremendous possibilities.

Even in the matter of population this is a century of radical shift. The author shows, from certain demographic surveys, that if at the beginning of this twentieth century 85% of Christians were found in the [first and second churches, at its end the third Church will claim a solid 58% of the Christians, leaving the other two only a combined 42% The reason for this shift is that "the Western and Oriental churches are static, registering only a slight increase in population and no new con-

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\* The author is reported to have lost his professorship because of the book under review with its wide vision and exciting perspectives. Are we then going back to pre-Vatican times! Let us hope that "the fire of Pentecost, hidden under human ashes in certain moments of crisis, will not be extinguished in the living Church of Christ" [words (not *sic*) of Pope Paul quoted in the introduction to the book by the author].

General Editor



versions, while they do experience losses" (p. 21). The third Church, on the other hand, is undergoing a demographic explosion as well as a great increase in the number of Baptisms. It is the church of the young, with the population in Asia and Africa 44% under 15 years of age and two thirds under the age of 25, while the western countries are preoccupied with the problem of old age. Hence the Church is gravitating towards peoples in the spring-time of their new life, remarkable for their initiative, optimism and freshness. The most important fact is that the Church is once again becoming the Church of the poor with the majority of her members in the poorest countries of the world, thereby experiencing the goodness, humanity, simplicity and integrity of poor people.

Most of the countries of the third world gained their independence from the colonial powers between 1945 and 1965 and are today facing the enterprising task of coping with the problems consequent upon freedom. In most countries the ideal of freedom has not been fully achieved. Besides, the world has still some more pockets of colonialism. In South Africa and Rhodesia small white minorities are keeping vast majority populations of blacks under unjust subjection. But in this situation, the Christian position is rather crazy: "Christians defending the minority and the side of injustice, while Communists stand for the majority and for justice." (p. 41)

The gaining of independence by the countries of the third Church provides a new opportunity for the missionary activity of the Church. So far the missions were generally considered an arm and auxiliary of the colonial powers. But now, after the foreign powers have left, the missionary activity of the Church still remains and continues and shows forth its independence, though some vestiges of the former dependence have still to be shed. Father Bühlmann explains at great length the details of this decolonization of mission activities.

The importance of the third Church is that it provides a new vision and outlook for the whole Church. In the matter of poverty and wealth not only is the third world able to profit from the scientific and technological progress already achieved by the West, but it is also able to show to the world that material



progress is not everything, that what hold up development are the greed of the rich, corruption among the ruling classes, even in the developing countries, and the apathy of the poor people themselves. In this context the emergence of China as a world power shaking off its dependence on foreign powers and emphasizing a spirit of self-reliance and hard work appears as a sign of salvation for the world coming from the East. With the re-emergence of Japan as a super-power and the victory of Vietnam in her struggle against the American super power, it is possible to imagine that the centre of the world of the future has shifted to Asia.

In the world of today there is a growing sense of paralysis and weariness and many feel that Western civilization is facing a serious crisis. But this challenge of the new situation can augur well for the Church if she chooses to be stimulated by the new problems and rejuvenated by the continual process of challenge and response. Today the idea of the mission is demythologized and even discredited, so much so that many think that missions and missionaries are at an end. But if the Church realizes her role in today's world, according to Buhlmann we are at the beginning of an extraordinary missionary era. To this end the Church has to emphasize human dignity, broaden people's sights and "turn the faithful gathered for worship into mature Christians and thus into model citizens of the state collaborating positively and courageously towards solving problems faced by the nation" (p. 99). In this way the Church will become the counter-balance or conscience of the State, exercising a function of social criticism. This, in fact, is the Church's prophetic function to be exercised with prudence and courage. Bühlmann picks out several examples, like Brazil and S. Africa, to explain how this prophetic role has to be exercised in a concrete way. Here even in enlisting financial aid from abroad for the development of the country the Church should realize that her role is only subsidiary in the external works of development; her task must be primarily one of animation and inspiration. The dichotomy between spiritual and temporal, evangelization and hominization, cannot be maintained any longer but has to be reconciled as two aspects of the same reality, "two dimensions of the one Church realized in this world by *kerygma* and *diakonia*, preaching and service, worship and social commitment". (p. 110) Similarly theology



itself must come to grips with the new situation with a new outlook. In order to recover its relevance it must be deprivatized from being concerned exclusively with the interior life of Christians and of the Church, and must deal with public issues, thereby in a sense depoliticizing itself by weakening its historical ties with the old structures (p. 117). The author affirms that what are needed here are not solemn documents but real deeds that will manifest the Church's involvement in the living social and political issues of today.

Coming to the missionary activity of the Church, the author points out that there is a tendency to exaggerate or to rely too much on the statistics of conversion. Though actual conversions and numbers are important, what is more important for the Church is to be a sign of salvation. Today the theological motivation for evangelization is not that individual members may be lost outside the Church, or the need to add more members to the Church as the Ark of Salvation, but the need to build up the Church as a sign of the saving grace of God. But taking into account the actual situation the prospects may not be equally bright in every country concerned. Africa may be beginning its brightest hour now, in hoping to have 57% of its population Christian by the end of the century. But the whole of Asia is only less than 1% Christian and even these Christians are concentrated in a few localities. To show how weak Christianity is in the rest of India, Buhlmann picks out, as an example, Kerala which is in area 1. 19% of India, has 37.5% of the Catholics, 60% of the priests and 77% of the sisters of India.

In the second part of the book the author takes up the discussion of the practical problems concerning the Church and her mission in the world. The book is a veritable encyclopedia of various questions, ideas and perspectives in this matter, giving the contemporary positions in each question. Over-centralization of authority in the Church, the position of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith, which has outlived its usefulness, the anomaly of the clerical Papal Legates representing the Pope in the various parts of the world, the need for new models to rejuvenate the life and worship of the Church, the complementarity between *kenosis* and contestation, the vital role of ecumenical dialogue not only with non-Catholics but also with



non-Christians, the importance of catechetical and biblical renewal, the waning importance of foreign missions and the growing emphasis on the active role of the Local Church, the anachronistic aspect of Christian schools, and a host of other living issues are discussed. One of the most vital problems that have come to the consciousness of the Church today is the baneful effects of the clericalization of the Church, starting with the privileges conferred by the emperor Constantine on the clergy and the consequent depreciation of the laity and of the charisms of the Spirit and the services and ministries. Only a return to the attitude of the early Church can revitalize the ministries of the Church.

On the whole *The Coming of the Third Church* is a comprehensive discussion of the present condition, challenges and opportunities of the Churches in the 'third world' and of the problems of the Church in general. The only complaint may be that these problems and issues are too many to be discussed in sufficient depth within a single book. But for what it is, it is a significant introduction to the various issues it presents.

John B. Chethimattam

*Bishop Patrick D'Souza (ed.)*

**REPORT of the General Meeting of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India,**

CBCI Centre, New Delhi, 1976, pp. 81 + (139).

This is more than a report of a meeting of Bishops, otherwise it would not have deserved a review. It is, as Bishop Patrick himself says in his foreword, "like a review of the working of the Church and of the Conference". But one would not agree with the statement if it means that the working of the official Indian Church, or of the Conference, is identified with that of the Indian Church as a whole.

The *Report* is in two parts: The first is particularly that of the general meeting, 1976, together with reports within the report: that of the Standing Committee, and points of importance from those of the Commissions and of the Committees of the CBCI. The second part has twelve appendices together with an index.



The appendices are lists of participants of the General Meeting, 1976, and of members of the Standing Committee, 1976-78, and of the Commissions and Committees, 1976-80, addresses of bishops and others at the General Meeting, consolidated workshop reports, statutes - both the present and the amended ones, a questionnaire from the Boundary Commission and a note about the Central Pool of Funds.

Bishop Patrick in his report of the Standing Committee, 1974-75 gives a short description of the stages in the organizational development of the CBCI to its present position of as many as 100 members with an efficient Secretariat in New Delhi. The CBCI has come to be a force to be reckoned with and consulted by both the Government of India and the Vatican. This being so, a separate Apostolic Nunciature becomes superfluous. For greater efficiency the CBCI has a Standing Committee and special Commissions and Committees on the Bible, Catechetics, Church Extension, Clergy, Dialogue, Ecumenism, Education, the Family and Laity, Justice, Development and Peace, Labour, Liturgy, Seminaries, Social Communications Media, Vocations and Youth; besides the joint CBCI-CRI Committee and the Ad-Hoc Committee for Harijan Welfare. According to the Secretary General, "it is through the Commissions that the CBCI carries out its normal work and it is an encouraging feature that the Commissions have functioned much more effectively than in the past" (p. 16). Part of the work of the Commissions is "Inter confessional translation of the Bible in regional languages: publication of catechism texts for Standards I to X; Refresher courses for Bishops in Theology; Organizing Live-ins and Dialogue with non-Christians in various parts of India; Regular contacts at various levels with other Churches; Strengthening of AINACS; Study of service conditions in Church-related institutions; Establishment of Family-life Centres and efforts to propagate methods of Natural Family Planning; Vocational Promoters Courses to cover all regions; Animation of diocesan youth Chaplains all over the country". Recently the CBCI has branched out into twelve Regional Bishops Councils with full responsibility for regional matters. This well accords with the needs of the different peoples of this vast country in language, culture and customs. Besides, Centres national and regional have been set up for fulfilling the needs of training, study and research. A very redeem-



ing feature of this wonderful organizational development has been the creation of a National Advisory Council. The question one would ask is why this remains merely advisory! But, then, even the Synod of Bishops, which is a corollary of the doctrine of collegiality of Vatican II, remains advisory still.

The main topic of this year's General Meeting was the More Efficient Working of the CBCI - a discussion of ways and means of making this organization more effective to deal with the challenges facing the Church in India today in preaching the saving word of God. This has been, according to the Secretary General, a reflection of the movement of the Church *ad intra*. But one doubts if the bulk and the main trend of the discussions took a look at the inner nature of the Church. It is true there were addresses on "The Vision of the Church" and "The Role of Bishops" and discussions based on them. Though these were meant to provide the right theological perspective for subsequent discussions, the latter (behind closed doors) seemed, to an outsider, to stand apart with their themes fixed much earlier, first proposed by the Review Committee and the Finance Committee and then carefully considered by the Standing Committee. The following were the themes: Finance, In-service Training, Commissions, CBCI Secretariat, Centres, General Body Meeting, Regional Bishops Councils and Lay Apostolate Organizations. Discussion on Bishop-Religious relationship came next in importance. Matters concerning the Holy See and the Government of India, besides general topics such as CBCI and Missio, relationship with FABC etc., were easily disposed of. But very heated discussions (held *in camera*) seem to have taken place on Liturgy, occasioned by the letter of Mgr Knox; and there are two different reports on experimentation (cf. pp. 38 and 75), perhaps the one or the other coloured by the reporter. Curious views were expressed by some of our bishops during the discussions. For example, one bishop took notice of dangerous trends in theology and new books on morals (which most probably carried the *imprimatur* of one or another bishop and *nihil obstat* of learned theologians). Others were rather over-confident that the time for experimentation allowed by Vatican II is past. They perhaps relied on certain lesser Roman documents, and were quite innocent of the fact that a section of Roman dignitaries other than the Pope want to put the Church back in pre-Vatican times. An appalling statement is



found in one of the addresses at the general meeting, viz. "in Christ they (bishops) have to be the way, the truth and the life". This looks tantamount to assuming divine prerogatives. The phrase 'in Chrtst' is hardly a saving one.

According to the *Report* "the Catholic Press was well represented by the editors of both English and vernacular papers . . . . As regards attendance of the press at the meeting, the Standing Committee had already decided, in October 1975, that for the present meeting, . . . the Catholic press could attend all the plenary sessions but not the workshops". But the accounts in some of the papers represented did not quite accord with it. Compare it with the editorial comment in *The Examiner* of January 24th, 1976: "For five general sessions the doors and the windows of the main hall, where the discussions took place, were closed, the microphones switched off, and an official of the CBCI Secretariat even went round to see if any words could be heard from outside and whether the press and members of the CRI were eavesdropping. The secrecy was obsessive. . . It was a perfect picture of pre-Vatican siege mentality. . . Only two general sessions remained and the five closed door sessions in addition to the numerous workshops from which the press was barred made sure that little that was of importance to the Church in this country would come to be known by the Catholic press and its readership in the country."

Going through the *Report* suggests the following questions:

(1) Are our bishops primarily rulers and administrators? Jesus' conception was that the first in his church should be the least. The Apostles themselves when they came up with administrative obstacles had the seven appointed by the community to "devote themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:2-5). There seems to be only one true vision of the Church - the Gospel vision of a brotherhood (Mt 23:8-10), a community of love in the Spirit. The hierarchy are in it, aren't they? They should be servants rather than arbiters, seers and announcers of heaven's decisions rather than makers of decisions (cf. Mt 16:19).



(2) Is not the Church in India still mostly clergy-bound in the diocese, in the parish and at the Centres both national and regional? There is plenty of planning for the people, but not with the people. Bishops (and for that matter, priests and directors) seem to take decisions by themselves instead of sharing them with the whole community.

(3) Has there been such "a definite trend", as the *Report* makes out, "to make the Church of Christ truly Christian and fully Indian, and more in keeping with the needs of the local Church" (p. 30)? Is the Church in India sufficiently free and autonomous, fully alive to her needs, and well-equipped to fulfil them? Or is she ever looking to Rome for direction concerning inculturation in liturgy, cooperation with other Churches and communities regarding education, medical care and social welfare, relationship with FABC, etc? It is surprising to note that even the statutes of the CBCI have to be approved by Rome.

It would be all to the good if this *Report* becomes eye-opener to our losses and gains, to our weaknesses and our strength! The future is undoubtedly for a Church that is thoroughly honest whose members - both bishops and theologians, clergy and the laity - will together try to get at the root of the problems facing them.

J. C. Manalel

*John B. Cobb Jr*

### CHRIST IN A PLURALISTIC AGE

Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1975, pp. 287, \$ 12. 50.

A number of philosophical trends in the West are having a radical influence on theological thinking. The process philosophy of Whitehead, the dialectics of Hegel, and the futuristic history of Pannenberg, are some of the forces that made John B. Cobb Jr. rethink his Christology. On the one hand there are a number of major world religions like Buddhism and Hinduism that cannot be reduced to the same basic reality so as to be termed merely other forms of Christianity. Hence the danger of an unqualified relativism. Christians find themselves in a paradoxical



situation today. If they are to find the right image that best communicates to others what they believe, "Christ" is not that image. But "no other image is identical with Christ, and theology itself cannot abandon its concern for just that image" (p. 20).

Some like David L. Miller emphasize Christianity's failure to achieve a single centre of meaning and existence that orders all meaning, and the emergence of a certain polytheism that urges the recognition of many centres of meaning not subordinated to any one centre. Cobb starts with Andre Malraux's perceptive and convincing interpretation of Christ in art, that first enfleshed and incarnated the Christ image, then personalized human beings, and finally dropped Christ altogether, substituting the artist himself in his place. Western art that embraces all art, has triumphed over Christ who is bound to the particular. Cobb's theory is that Christ has not disappeared, but rather receding from the external visible form has become the inner spirit, "the image of creative transformation" providing a unity within which the many centres of meaning can be appreciated. Cobb traces the recent history of Christianity's approach to other religions. From that attitude of the absolutisation of Christianity, and total neglect of other religions as perversions, there was a growing interest in Eastern religions from the beginning of the 19th century. First they were considered primitive expressions of human religious sentiment inferior to the monotheism of Christianity. But Schopenhauer emphasized their value as challenges to the simplistic optimism of Christianity, and Rudolf Otto and Ernst Troeltsch, still holding on to the absoluteness of Christianity, showed the positive value of Eastern religions. Karl Barth shifted the emphasis of absoluteness from Christianity to Christian faith, and as a result scholars of religion pursued their study of religions as a historical, sociological and psychological phenomenon. Under the impact of the study of religion as a profane phenomenon, Christianity itself has been increasingly desacralized and reduced to psychological and sociological perspectives. Today the transcendent and absolute God is reduced to Christ, and Christ himself becomes identified with suffering humanity, the normative of the human struggle in theologies of hope and liberation. Since any new order that liberation will lead us to, will have its own new forms



of oppression. Christ is the symbol and inner spirit of the unending drive toward liberation, yesterday, today and tomorrow. The danger of pluralism posed by the religions is countered when Christians name Christ as the transforming power that relativizes every position, even the system of Christian values produced under historically conditioned circumstances. "Christ always means, regardless of what the cultural values are, that they must be relativized without being abrogated; that the believer lives toward the future rather than attempting to defend, repeat or destroy the past; that each should be open to the neighbour, in whom also one meets the claim of Christ; and that the good in what is now happening is to be completed and fulfilled" (p: 59).

But this does not mean that Christ is simply a series of events. Christ is the image, the Logos, the meaning of all meaning, the Lord and Saviour both of the public world and of individual persons in their inward experience. He cannot be the immanent aspect of events unless he is also the transcendent Logos. Christ is the "initial aim", the "other" immanent conscience as the term of experience. He is not a Freudian superego, the introjection of social mores, but "connotes a static grasp of principles". As conscience is immediately accessible to consciousness, the Logos that normally undercuts established habits of mind and poses a constant challenge to established order, assumes the form of love in Christ and inspires trust.

But this Christ is also Jesus the Nazarene carpenter who radically influenced history both by his message as well as by an objective efficacy. Jesus has through his teaching opened up new possibilities that shatter the self-assurance and complacency of the Pharisee and offered salvation to the Publican. Christ's death and resurrection created an objective field of force from the past, that like any other past event can become the centre of experience for anyone who, by personal decision, wants to conform to it, in the way Paul made Christ his life. Thus rejecting Luther's mechanical concept of justification, which accepts the sinner as he is, as well as Schweitzer's "Christ-mysticism", which placed the emphasis on the subjective element, Cobb attempts to find a *via media* between the two by applying Whitehead's process philosophy according to which "events are not simply located but



instead pervade their causal future" (p. 118). Even the 'I' is not a self-identical substantial entity "but the centre around which experience organizes itself" (p. 123).

The basis of the field of force created by the Christ event is Christ's person. In spite of all the efforts to strip Jesus of all divine prerogatives people are forced to recognize in him a great authority, claiming even the power to forgive sins, arising from his relationship to the Logos. Though the Logos is in everything and every human being, in Jesus there is a distinct incarnation because "his very selfhood was constituted by the Logos" (p. 139), "his 'I' was co-constituted by the incarnate Logos" (p. 144). Though Cobb says that this union is something deeper than the psychological level, in his explanation of it he places in the absence of resistance in Jesus to the call of the Logos especially "to accept pain and suffering as a continual part of existence". "Jesus' structure of existence . . . was one in which the tension of self and Logos was overcome in coalescence" (p. 145). Following Reginald Fuller, Cobb interprets the Chalcedonian affirmation of the pre-existence and consubstantiality of Christ with the Father as a distortion of the original message introduced by the missionaries to the Gentiles, whose primary concern was not national restoration but "deliverance from the powers which held man in thrall-fate and death" (p. 149). The positive element in this was the hope it presented humanity with, of entering a blessed immortality beyond the grave. This was the element by which the Antiochean and Alexandrian schools jointly won against competing philosophies and religions of their time since in Christ they presented a greater hope with more confidence. This hope is the central point, according to Cobb, the central concern of contemporary theology, in Thomas Altizer's dialectical theology of hope as coincident with despair, Jurgen Moltmann's theology of hope inspired by Ernst Bloch's protest against the de-eschatologization of Christianity, and Teilhard de Chardin's cosmic march to the Omega point. Christ who transforms the world by persuading it towards relevant novelty is the hope of the world.

The advantage of seeing Christ as the hope of humanity is that it combines, without embarrassment, Christian faith with the contemporary images of progress that dominate our public affairs. Similarly naming the Logos, the principle of creative transforma-



tion, "Christ", implies the acceptance of other traditions and religions which embody the expression of the same Logos. Of course, identification of Christ with the Logos makes encounter with other traditions, which are radically different, rather difficult, when it goes beyond a certain tolerance. But openness to the real otherness of religions can help Christ's function of creative transformation in one's own tradition, just as Christianity was, after an initial resistance, creatively transformed by the Greek religion. Cobb explains, at great length, that the coming together of externally similar religions like Buddhism and Christianity implies radical transformation of both in perfect empathy and perfect *agape*. The vision provided by Jesus' resurrection of the idea of the kingdom of heaven provides the ground for a universal hope for fulfilled personal existence beyond life not only of oneself but of others.

John Cobb's vision of Christ in a pluralistic age shows the tortuous ways in which Liberal Protestantism is struggling to regain a sense of the centrality of Christ, without retracting the concessions already made to modern humanistic philosophies. Whitehead's process vision of humanity, Altizer's hope in despair and the like, are several steps in the same attempt. Cobb's Christology leaves a great number of points unexplained. For him Logos and Spirit are only aspects of God wrongly designated by the Church as distinct hypostases by a confusing use of language. Logos refers to the Son in his transcendence and Christ to his immanence or incarnation. Here Cobb seems to be confused by the Western Christian tradition that fixed attention on the unity of God first and then came to pay attention to the three persons, and seems to be totally unaware of the Eastern tradition that fixed its attention on the three distinct divine persons first and then came to examine their substantial unity in the Godhead. If the Logos is not a distinct person "the Incarnation is nothing more than an Avatar and the Son-Father relationship is a mere fiction. If Jesus' structure of existence was one in which the tension of self and Logos was overcome in coalescence, we are still in the position of Nestorianism, for which Jesus was merely a container of the Logos and not the Saviour of humanity. If Jesus was merely one expression of the incarnation of the Logos among several others, Christianity is nothing more than a passing sociological, historical phenomenon, with no mission for the world.



It would then be presumptuous to speak of Jesus Christ as *the* image of the creative transformation of all humanity. He would be only one possible model among several other valid images. Cobb's plea for the encounter of religions in openness and internal creative transformation is an appeal for syncretism. Truth is not attained through compromise of one's basic faith but by finding out what is fundamental and authentic in one's position. If Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God, who has attached to his divine selfhood a complete human nature, by his capacity to influence all human beings he has become the focal point of the one human history that embraces all men; and the resurrection from the dead and glorification of that limited and particular human nature is the divine symbol and promise of the acceptance of all that is authentic and valid in all human history. If this historical centrality of Christ in the one human family is uncompromisingly admitted the authentic visions of other religions like the Buddha ideal of Buddhism and the interiority of Hinduism appear as authentic contributions that may be accepted without any compromise. If this is not accepted Christianity has no firm ground to stand on, no contribution to make in a religious dialogue which will be a destructive transformation of one's authentic faith. Cobb's book is a very clear exposition of the radical compromises we have to make if we are not willing to accept the divinity of Christ and his central position in human history.

John B. Chethimattam

*Roger Hazelton*

**ASCENDING FLAME, DESCENDING DOVE,**

An Essay on Creative Transcendence, Philadelphia,  
The Westminster Press, 1975, pp. 128, \$ 3. 75.

Liberalism, which imagined that one could say God by saying man in a loud voice, and Neo-orthodoxy which thought that revelation created its own response in human beings, have had their first say in their struggle to dominate theology today. Evidently they have to lie down together like the lion and the lamb in Isaia's prophecy. On the one hand people are losing confidence in an abstract Super-Being up there who merely creates,



rules and judges other beings, while on the other, there is a wider realization that "there is more to being and becoming human than the analysts, statisticians and explainers have thus far produced" (p. 12). This is the central theme of the book *Ascending Flame, Descending Dove*.

Today language itself and traditional concepts have undergone an inflation becoming 'something like fill to a builder, simply covering over holes of thought'. Hazelton examines as examples the concepts of 'transcendence' and 'creative'. For the author the image of the ascending flame and descending dove taken from an untitled painting of Jan he Witt, dated 1973, symbolizes the courageous self-giving and self-fulfilling, which he calls creative transcendence. The distinction between the divine and the human exaggerated by the either/or attitude of traditional theology has lost its meaning for the contemporary questioning which has long passed the "symbols of monarchical authority, military conquest, patriarchal ownership, even male supremacy, and their opposites" (p. 32).

In Christian thought transcendence implies immanence; the transcendent beyond can be experienced. Theologians are looking in human experience for 'models', 'myths' and 'signals' that indicate a range of reality that cannot be reduced or confined to experience. Consideration of experience in terms of its so-called contents greatly impoverishes our understanding of what any fact of experience is, and leads to a highly theoretical factualism and neutralism modelled on techniques employed in natural sciences. Art itself, which emphasizes the immediate and whole acquaintance and direct vision of things, exists to see and make seen 'a nature behind the ordinary' Even the present obsession with self-identity is not to confine oneself in the person of one's selfish interests but, in the words of Virginia Woolf, to 'achieve a symmetry by means of infinite discords, showing all the traces of the mind's passage through the world; achieve in the end some kind of whole made of shimmering fragments' (quoted on p. 49). The most important human experience is "of being taken 'out of ourselves' by which transcendence becomes a matter of our deepest truest self hood" (p. 59).



The theologian has to express this transcendence in symbols, like the Zen Master who described Buddha as the blossoming branch of a plum tree, and a pink fish with golden fins swimming idly through the blue sea. He has to keep the symbol truly symbolic at the same time as saying what it really means. Failure to take symbols seriously has led to abuse of symbols, like the 'Father' idea of God to legitimize oppression and the 'Body of Christ' symbols of the Church to identify the institutional Church with the Word made flesh. The theologian has to rise above the immediate concerns of the social activist, and leave aside the traditional phrases that have been clichés, and re-symbolize the message of life of faith, having direct recourse to the actualities to which people in another time referred. He has to realize his unique role as "a special kind of artist, a fashioner of icons and themes capable of evoking and addressing contemporary consciousness" (p. 91). He has to return to the original experience of faith as the matrix of theological reflexion. In this way alone can theology maintain continuity with, and responsibility for, its own past.

But the important fact is that there is a crisis of faith facing all. People have become weary of all the 'god' talk, and turned to the pictures lavishly supplied by the sciences and literature. Hence the contemporary theologian has to turn "from talking about what makes God divine to talking about what makes men and women human" (p. 95). Hazelton reports the words of John Marsh in a talk on the Holy Spirit at Oxford: "The Holy Spirit comes not to make humans Christian but to make Christians human". In spite of all the objections questioning the propriety of speaking about God in objective terms, it still remains a fact that "God" has much to say about the meaning of man himself. The image of God in man is, as Hazelton says, quoting Rahner, "the experiential mystery at the heart of human existence". Similarly the doctrines of grace and of the Spirit show the spurting of the human flame upwards in response to the Dove that descends.

This is delightful and very timely book. The only unpleasant element in the book is the lack of comprehension which the author shows to new concrete resymbolizations in theology, like the theologies of liberation, and of political or racial justice which he calls "well-intentioned but fractured efforts to make theology relevant" (p. 90). The new meaningful symbols for theology have to be drawn from personal and social concerns if the human flame is to rise heavenwards.



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# Editorial

“In our times when every day men are being drawn closer together and the ties between various peoples are being multiplied the Church is giving *deeper study* to her relationship with non-Christian religions. In her task of fostering *unity and love among men and even among nations*, she gives primary consideration... to what human beings *have in common* and to what promotes fellowship among them...

From ancient times down to the present, there has existed among diverse peoples, a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human life. At times, indeed, recognition can be found of a Supreme Divinity and of a Supreme Father too. Such a perception and such a recognition instil the lives of these people with a profound religious sense...

Thus in *Hinduism men contemplate the divine mystery* and express it through an unspent fruitfulness of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry. They seek release from the anguish of our condition through *ascetical practices or deep meditation or a loving and trusting flight toward God...*

The Catholic Church, rejects nothing which is *true* and *holy* in these religions. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and of life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect that Truth which enlightens all men...

The Church therefore, has this exhortation for her sons: prudently and lovingly, through *dialogue and collaboration* with the followers of other religions,



and in witness of the Christian faith and life, *acknowledge, preserve and promote* the spiritual and moral goods found among these men, as well as the values in their society and culture."

(Vatican II, *Declaration on Church's Relationship with Non-Christian Religions*, arts. 1 & 2)

This official exhortation of the Church has inspired us to take up the study of the Indian spiritual traditions and their *sādhana*s which should form part of the "Fullness of Life", the last section of *Jeevadhara*. Almost all our national as well as regional seminars have repeated time and again the need of such a venture. To quote just one document:

"In India it is especially necessary if Christians are to enter into a truly fraternal relationship in the Spirit with their fellow-country men whose own religious traditions are also profoundly characterised by a sense of *interiority and prayer* which makes them keenly aware of the immanence of God in themselves and in all things. To foster this contemplative awareness in the Indian Church it is essential that the life of religious communities should be renewed so that it may be more in keeping with what they profess" (*Declaration of the International Theological Conference on Evangelisation and Dialogue, Nagpur, 1971*, arts. 44-45).

In this number of *Jeevadhara* a modest approach has been made towards introducing some aspects of the Indian spirituality. Though we cannot identify "Indian" as "Hindu" in all religio-cultural matters, for the sake of definiteness, we have chosen only the "Arya-Hindu" religio-spiritual tradition of the diverse and vast cultural heritage of India. We cannot claim also that what we have brought out here is exhaustive. Another note we would like to strike here is that the issues of Indian spirituality discussed in the articles are not archaic remains of an ancient religiosity. Though some historical survey is done in the course of exposition the authors have given special attention to see that it is part of the living religious spirituality that is presented



here. The *sādhana*s and the *sādhya* are the same for all sincerely committed believers of Hinduism either in their popular style of living or in the modern religious communities of the Ramakrishna Mission or of the Chinmayananda Mission. We have also followed an interreligious dialogical method in this study.

In order to discuss the typically Indian aspects of spirituality that can change the future language of Indian Christian spirituality we need a historical retrospection of the traditional Christian language of spirituality. And this can be a point of departure. Paul Puthenangady does this job splendidly when he describes the language of Christian spirituality on its evolutionary march towards a new language of spirituality for Christians as they prepare themselves to respond to the challenges of national cultures. He has shown how in the past the development of language has affected also the linguistic genres of the spirituality and how the same rule should change the spirituality of today and prospectively give shape to new languages of spirituality for tomorrow.

But it is the change of meaning of words that fundamentally affects a spiritual tradition and its language. J. Ousepparampil has shown how even from the Vedic times grammarians interpreted the primordial "Word" (*Vāk*) as something very sacred because of its immanence in all other derived words of men. The Logos of the Divine gives sacred meaning to all human words and that is his philosophy of the spirituality of *Vāk*. Swami Vikrant goes further to analyse the two traditional concepts of *Asceticism: Hindu and Christian*, in order to see whether they were in history life-affirming or life-denying. His thesis is that there is no historical justification for interpreting the Hindu as well as Christian ascetical traditions as pessimistic. Such a misunderstanding has to be corrected.

Swami Bhajanananda of the Ramakrishna Ashram, Bangalore, interprets the spiritual *sādhana*s of both Hinduism and Christianity. He establishes the fundamental identity of the spiritual disciplines though the theological implications of the *sādhya* (goal of realization) are different. Prasannabhai of the Wardha Christian Ashram explains the spirituality of *niṣkāma karma* and according to the degree of realization he explains that *niṣkāma karma* is the



real Christian spiritual discipline in accordance with the model of Christ's personality and his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

The next article on the applicability of *aṣṭāṅga yoga* in Christian spiritual discipline (T. M. Manickam) presents the complete spiritual *sādhana* of Patanjali the founder of the *Yoga darśana*. Since it is an integral discipline disposing an aspirant to spiritual liberation it can be safely experimented with even in Christian institutes of spiritual training. Now, yoga promises liberation, and the Christian seeks salvation. The Christian salvation and the Yogic liberation are not necessarily one and the same. They are mutually complementary. V. F. Vineeth in his article "Yoga and the Reversal of the Fall" maintains that Yoga is in fact aimed at working out a reversal of the fall from which the Christian wants to be saved.

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# The Language of Spirituality

Language expresses not only the content of a concept, but also the attitudes of those who speak, because it manifests the meaning of something to somebody. Another characteristic of language is that it is the chief means by which a person organizes his experiences.

Spirituality is the structuring of one's faith according to one's proper genius, vocation and charismatic gifts in order to give an appropriate response to the Spirit. Now the spirit reveals Himself not only through the written word and the oral teaching of the Church, but also through the tangled affairs of man. This revelation, therefore, changes according to the type of people and situations that He speaks through. The response of the person to this revelation is his spirituality. The language of the situation to some extent conditions the response.

When we speak of the language of spirituality we do not intend a mere mode of expressing a spiritual value, in the abstract, but also the manner of speaking which in a certain sense changes or gives a new understanding to the value itself. The language reveals not only the content of the response to the Spirit, but also the attitude of the one who responds. The language organizes and catalogues the experience of revelation which people living in varying cultural and philosophical milieus have had. In this process of elaborating a spiritual system, there takes place a re-interpretation of traditional ideas, along with the creation of a whole new spiritual vocabulary. The old words, the old ideas and the old definitions, then cease to have the same significance or the same function in the new language in which they are expressed<sup>1</sup>. Hence a careful analysis of the language of spirituality can give us correct insight into the various types of

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1) Michael de Certeau, *Culture and Spiritual experience*, in Christopher Duquoc, O. P. (Ed.) *Spirituality in the secular city*, in Concilium Theology in the age of renewal, Vol 19 (New York, 1966) pg. 8.



spiritualities of the past. It can also help us to create a new language in order to create correct attitudes in the people of today. Perhaps it can also enable us to discover genuine spirituality in the world and in the people of today described as "non-spiritual" and even "irreligious". They may be using a language that is different from ours in expressing their response to the Spirit. This becomes all the more possible when we realize that our present civilization is perhaps the first non-religious civilization, ever to exist.

## 1. The factors that have influenced the language of Christian spirituality in the past

The history of spirituality is nothing but that of the relationship between a culture and the spiritual world. In our case it is the account of an effort to express the experience of the Gospel in cultural terms<sup>2</sup>. Among the many factors that influenced the language of Christian spirituality in earliest times we can point out the following as having played a very important role and as still influencing the spiritual life of the Christian community.

### a) Stoicism

The starting point of stoic ethics is man in his rational nature. To be virtuous means to perfect this nature. The goal of human life is to live in harmony with nature. Passion, being the cause of faulty judgement, is an obstacle in the way of this objective. Hence it must be suppressed. One must arrive at the state of impassibility (*apatheia*)<sup>3</sup>. The early Fathers, especially Clement of Alexandria<sup>4</sup>, and some of the later authors of the patristic period such as St Ambrose<sup>5</sup>, and others of the later Middle Ages, took much from Seneca and other Stoics. One of

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2) "Experience is always defined in cultural terms, even when it is religious" M. J. Herskovits, *Cultural anthropology* (New York 1955)

3) Friedo Ricken, *Stoicism*, in *Sacramentum Mundi* V. Cauchy, *Stoicism*, in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*.

4) Clement of Alexandria, *Paidagogos*, 2nd book.

5) St. Ambrose, *De Officiis*



the important aspects of Christian spirituality, namely, the purification process, was understood and described by the early Fathers in terms of the stoic category as is evident from the vocabulary they used. "In describing the state resulting from the purgation of the soul by mortification of the 'pathe' (passions), the Fathers draw largely on the teaching of the Stoics. These had already made the name, 'apatheia', the property of their ideal of self-mastery, realized in the voluntary subjection of reason to the master of the universe to the contempt of sensible impressions"<sup>6</sup> Although Stoicism, as a philosophical system was not accepted by the Christians, its ethical vocabulary continues in our spiritual theology even to this day.

## b) Manicheism

The dualistic explanation of reality is at the basis of Manichean ethics. Duality is present everywhere in the visible world. This suggests the moral attitudes to be adopted by men. The principle of Good is represented as light, spirit, soul etc., while the principle of Evil is represented by darkness, matter, body etc. There will be salvation when Good totally subdues Evil. The religious life of man consists in the effort to free the Good from the Evil.<sup>7</sup> In spite of the fact that the Church has always opposed manicheism in its different forms, it has to be admitted that Christian asceticism in its battle against evil was tempted to confuse its motivation with the dualistic view of the reality. This confusion comes about from (erroneous) identification of the Greek opposition between the body and the soul with the contrast made by St Paul between what he calls 'the flesh' and 'the Spirit'. But for St Paul, 'the flesh' is not 'the body' but the whole human being, body and soul, which is in opposition to the action of the Holy Spirit who dwells in the justified man. We see here how Christian terminology has at times been unconsciously misinterpreted under the influence of Manichean ethics and thus a new meaning has been given to the original expressions.

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6) L. Bouyer, *Introduction to spirituality*, (New York 1961) pg. 252.

7) J. Ries, *Manicheism*, in New Catholic Encyclopedia



### c) Gnosticism

Current especially in the early centuries of the Christian era, this religious philosophy taught the doctrine that salvation is achieved through knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Even though the Christian idea of 'gnosis', salvific knowledge, is different from that of the Gnostics, it is undeniable that the so-called 'illuminative way' in Christian spirituality was described in terms that were influenced by gnosticism. The distinction between the contemplative and the active life is a clear instance in point.

## 2. The factors that influence the language of spirituality today

The language of spirituality today is changing. It is no longer the glorious ornament of a privileged few (the clerical and monastic families). The Second Vatican Council has democratized the concept of spirituality by declaring solemnly the 'universal call to holiness'.<sup>9</sup> This has been concretely spelt out along the following lines: the new spirituality springs from the spiritual appetite of Christians for the Gospels caused by a widespread biblical movement; from the participation of the faithful in the liturgy, effected by the popular liturgical movement; from the new relationship that has been established between the Christian and the world through a re-consideration of the link between the Gospel and culture.<sup>10</sup> A new language of spirituality will have to emerge as a result of these changed situations. It will no more be, perhaps, the language of a particular school of thought or of a centre of spirituality; in all probability it will be the language of the common man, who has been initiated into the various aspects of spiritual life such as, liturgy, the Bible, contemplation, which hitherto have been the realm of a privileged few in the Church. We shall now analyse some of the characteristics of this new language.

a) It should express a spirituality for life in the world, that is, a spirituality in which the world is accepted. In other

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8) G. W. Mac Rae, *Gnosticism*, in New Catholic Encyclopedia.

9) L. G. ch. V: The call of the whole Church to holiness.

10) G. S. no. 57,58.



words, the Christian of today would like to consider his spiritual life as a response to the God who speaks to him through his life and activity and not outside it or during intervals between his professional duties. That is why today people speak of a spirituality of marriage, spirituality of work, spirituality of events and human relationships, spirituality of leisure etc. The contemporary man likes to hear and respond to the word of God in the midst of his environment and in his human tasks.

b) It expresses the spirituality of genuine evangelical experience. At first sight, it might seem strange that there should ever have been a spirituality that was not based on this. Although it is not possible to have a Christian spirituality that is not based on an experience of the word of God, our traditional Spirituality, in fact, did not sufficiently highlight this point. Our spirituality was based more on the word that was reflected upon and not sufficiently on the Word that was listened to. When we listen we have direct experience and it is to some extent total, with regard to the subject and with regard to the object. A new language is bound to come out of such renewed experience of the word of God.

c) It expresses a spirituality that is lived in evangelical brotherhood. The shift in spiritual life has taken place from 'the spirit' to the 'SPIRIT'. The latter is essentially a community builder because here the Pentecostal experience is renewed, while in the former there is the danger of remaining within the limitations of the body which it animates. This is very evident in manifestations of group-life in prayer and apostolate.

The renewal of Vatican II has affected the spiritual life of the Church very radically because it demands not merely a return to the sources, but to the Source. When we return to the sources, we remain on the level of research and intellectual activity, but when we return to the Source we come into contact with life itself. The experience that we have as a result of this is so rich that it cannot be fully expressed. To some extent it is ineffable. It can be expressed in a great variety of ways, according to the cultural pluralism of the society. This is another characteristic of the language of spirituality today. It is conditioned by the pluralistic approach to reality that is slowly gaining ground in



the theological reflections of today. Christian spirituality will have a greater variety of expressions. As a consequence, the language of spirituality will be in a state of continuous evolution.

### 3. The effect of language on spirituality

If it is true that our speech is the expression of our thought, it is also true that our thought is quite often conditioned by our speech. A particular way of speaking, therefore, not only reveals a mentality, but also contributes towards the formation of a mentality. The analysis of certain expressions in our spiritual jargon will show how their changed meanings have also affected our understanding of spiritual life itself. The change in meaning has been, in turn, caused by the particular philosophical or cultural background of a society in a given period of history. A few samples of such expressions follow.

#### a) *Terrena despiciere*

Quite often this expression is understood by people and translated in spiritual treatises as 'to despise earthly things.' Unconsciously, there is a veiled influence of Manicheism here. In reality the expression has to be understood differently as 'looking at things of this world from above' (*despicere* = to look from above). When one looks at things from above he sees reality in a better perspective. Hence the expression really means to evaluate the things of this world. This evaluation would imply either the acceptance of earthly realities or their rejection, according to the value judgement that one makes of them. It would, therefore, not signify the rejection of all earthly realities, as the phrase seems to signify in spiritual treatises as well as the common language of the recent past.

#### b) Asceticism

In the Stoic connotation this term signifies a system of practices designated to eradicate vice and cultivate virtues.<sup>11</sup> In the original Greek it meant an exercise or practice for the purpose of obtaining something that represents an ideal. In Christianity we can notice a gradual evolution in the meaning of the term

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11) Sergius Wroblewski, *Christ-centered spirituality* (New York) pg. 196



according to the change in the ideal of the Christian. In the first three centuries, the immediate ideal of the Christian was martyrdom. So 'asceticism' meant a training for martyrdom. This was done mainly by keeping alive the faith of the Christian, because the martyr was the one who was able to bear witness to his faith in the risen Lord. With the peace of Constantine, it was necessary to find a substitute for the ideal of martyrdom. Unfortunately martyrdom was understood by many more as "death" than as an act of witnessing to Christ. Hence, the Christian looked for the nearest approach to death that he could devise. Men flocked to the desert to live as hermits; a life as far removed from the human as possible; they did incredible fasts, some were naked and even ate grass.<sup>12</sup> Thus the word 'asceticism' began to be applied exclusively to a life of renunciation.

### c) Contemplation

According to one of the traditional definitions, contemplation is that activity which has God as its objects and God precisely as experienced through supernatural virtues and gifts.<sup>13</sup> This description gave the impression that it is possible only to a few privileged persons. But the Constitution on the Church very clearly shows that all Christians are called to contemplation because all are called to holiness, which consists in union with God who is love.<sup>14</sup> In the present economy of salvation this can be effected only by an act of involvement in that world which God so loved that he gave His only Son.<sup>15</sup> This act of involvement necessarily leads to an act of thanksgiving by which, recognizing through faith the gift of God, we joyfully cry out to Him in gratitude with a love responding to His own love poured into our hearts by the Spirit He has given us.<sup>16</sup> Far from being a rare, aesthetic exercise possible only to a few, it thus becomes the core of the normal Christian life. The new vision of created realities enables the Christian to discover and experience this love in the midst of his activities.

12) *Spirituality through the ages*, Sythesis series no. 50, pg. 14

13) See New Catholic Encyclopedia

14) L. G. 41, 42

15) John 3, 16

16) L. Bouyer, op. cit. pg. 42



#### d) Spiritual life

The expression is quite often used to mean the life of the spirit as opposed to that of the flesh or body. This dichotomy has its philosophical roots in Stoicism and Manicheism. In the genuine Christian way of understanding, man is a totality, in whom the Spirit of God dwells<sup>17</sup>; and spiritual life is understood as a life in the Spirit of the risen Christ. This would imply, in the first instance, an experience of the risen Christ. It is a life, therefore, that begins in love and joy. It is a life that has to be lived in the sharing of this love and joy with our fellow-men. It is a life that leads man to communication and communion with his brothers and sisters. It is a life that is eminently positive. The negative elements of renunciation and suffering enter into this life only as a preparation for sharing. The sense of alienation and self-centeredness has to be overcome in order to make joy and love flow from one to another. The Spirit of God that dwells in the believers is freed from all the obstacles that prevent the building up of the community of love, the community of the Spirit, by acts of self-renunciation. Understood in this sense, spiritual life has its centre in love by which the whole person grows to maturity and reaches the stature of the risen Christ.

#### e) Spiritual exercise

Here again we have an expression which has undergone radical changes. It is commonly used to indicate the so-called "retreats" of the religious and of other pious persons. It is interesting to note that during the first 500 years of her existence the whole Church felt the need for an annual renewal in preparation for the feast of Easter, and thus Lent, which was originally meant for the preparation of the catechumens for Baptism, became a period of penance and conversion for all. Many pious Christians, especially the religious, entered into a state of Penitence by accepting to do public penance during this period. Renewal and conversion were understood by them in terms of a revitalization of their relationship in the community. But in the Middle Ages, when this community sense was lost to a great extent, Lent became a period for meditating on the passion of

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17) 1 Cor. 3, 16



Christ; for community Lenten practice the religious and pious persons substituted their annual spiritual retreats which became more an occasion for the renewal of the individual without much reference to the community. If we could give back to Lenten practices their genuine community dimension, it would be the ideal way of renewing communities, both religious and lay. Especially, today, when the life of the religious is understood in terms of a deeper baptismal life, would it not be better if they entered into the ecclesial community during Lent with a deeper awareness of their sense of belonging to it and worked towards their renewal in this ecclesial context?

### f) Mysticism

It is defined as 'the consciousness of the experience of un-created grace as revelation and self-communication of the triune God'<sup>18</sup>. This understanding of mysticism is not exactly what the early Church had. Etymologically this term comes from the Greek "mystikos" which simply means "hidden" and was used in the context of the "mystery-religions". For Paul, the Christian Mystery is "Jesus Christ and Him crucified". It is "Christ in us, the hope of glory".<sup>19</sup> The mystic is one who has entered into this Christian Mystery. Mysticism is the Christian state of life in the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Now, the Paschal Mystery of Christ has a double dimension, one vertical and the other horizontal. It is an act by which Christ offered up Himself in obedience to the Father and arrived at perfect communion with Him through His resurrection and ascension. Quite often it is this aspect of the mystery of Christ that is stressed when people speak of mysticism. Even the darkness of the soul which mystics like St. John of the Cross speak of this vertical type, the experience of the absence of God. But there is another aspect of the Paschal Mystery, the horizontal one, by which Christ extended His hands to other men in His death and reached out to all through His resurrection and through Pentecost. This also should be part of Christian mysticism. This is the horizontal mysticism of a Christian who is involved in the task of continuing Christ's work of gathering men into a community of brothers and sisters. Here the darkness and

18) H. Fiscer, *Mysticism*, in *Sacramentum Mundi*

19) 1 Cor. 2, 6-9.



suffering are acute and experienced moment by moment because they consist in the act of giving oneself to brothers and sisters in need. This was not sufficiently included in the traditional understanding of mysticism. It is necessary to bring this concept back for a more complete grasp of genuine Christian mysticism.

### Conclusion

It is undeniable that a new language of spirituality is emerging in the world of today. We find it not only in professional works on spirituality, but in the ordinary language of modern man. The re-discovery of the sources the Gospel and liturgy, is giving to Christians of today a new experience of Christian mysteries. The Gospel is not only a 'sacred' book containing principles of Christian life but a living reality which is clamouring for expression in the twentieth century. Liturgy is not a mere act of worship of God, but the celebration of a Christ-like involvement in the world of today. A new life in the Spirit is bound to emerge from these experiences. The Christian will have to communicate this new life to his brothers and sisters in a language that they understand. For this purpose he has to enter their world, and experience together with them their life with all its joys and sorrows, concerns and pre-occupations, and then speak to them as Christ would speak in the light of the experience he has received through his contact with the Master. This language will vary according to the varying cultural, religious, political, social and other aspects of the life of those to whom he speaks. Hence the new language of spirituality will be conditioned not only by the Gospel, but also by the various aspects of the life of the people of the world. Here there is no question of teaching the language of Christian spirituality to others, but of creating a new language together with them, in the context of a living experience shared with them. The value of this new language will not be determined any more by the accuracy and precision of the terms that are coined to express the speculative content but by a capacity to meet the vital needs of the man of today with regard to his happiness, fulfilment, development of personality, etc. It should be a language that will help the Holy Spirit to speak in a meaningful way to present-day people. Thus, the work of the Holy Spirit, in reminding men of the Mystery of Christ, will be continued in a relevant manner and as a consequence there will be a more fruitful human response to God. This will be the renewed face of the earth.



# Spirituality of Vak in Indian Tradition

“Rapt in thought I roam about in secret,  
Then came to me Vak (Word) R̥ta’s first born.  
And quick! I enjoy a portion of her” (RV 1. 164. 37).

The study of the spirituality of *Vāk* (Word of God) which starts from the Vedic period grows to a vast science through the ages. Here the study of this subject is limited to the tradition of grammarians in the Sanskrit language. Grammar is a *vedāṅga*<sup>1</sup> a science auxiliary to the study of the Vedas. Hence, a glimpse of the “Logos doctrine” of the Vedas, Brahmanas and Upaniṣads as interpreted by the Paniniyam grammar schools, mainly of Patanjali and Bhartṛhari, is now presented. We know, for a fact, that languages existed first and all the attributions of sacredness to it occurred later. Indians were the first linguistic and philosophical theologians. The science of language is common to all the systems of learning. According to *Sarvaparīśadam śāstram* (*Vākya-pādiya* 3. 3. 1)<sup>2</sup> Grammar is the only science with scientific precision in its enunciation of principles, a unique development of the Indian mind in linguistic science. To understand the Vedas grammar was needed. So it became important as a religious pursuit: as a *vedāṅga*.<sup>3</sup> Grammar is the mouth of the Vedas (*Sikṣā*).

1. *Vedāṅga*: Limb (preserving the body) of the Vedas. The Vedas were studied for sacrificial purposes. *Vedāṅgas* rendered clarity, regarding the sacrificial performances. *Vedāṅgas* are: *Sikṣā*, *Chandas*, *Vyākaraṇa*, *Nirukta*, *Jyotiṣa* and *Kalpa*.

2. Vedic and Sanskrit quotations are generally left out to facilitate printing and save space. But exact references are given. All the references to *Vākya-pādiya* (VP) of Bhartṛhari are given from K. A. S. Iyer’s edition *Kanda I* and *Kanda III* Pt. i and ii Deccan College, Poona, with the commentary of Helaraja and Punyaraja unless otherwise mentioned.

3. Cf. P. C. Chakravarti, “Spiritual Outlook of Sanskrit Grammar”, *Journal of Calcutta University*, vol. 25, 1934, p. 1-11.



## The spiritual goal of the Vak

In ancient India no quest was made without a spiritual goal. Indians sought spiritual truth and personal fulfilment at every turn. Grammar was not confined to the study of the use and derivation of words but had a spiritual outlook. It was a *Sādhana*<sup>4</sup> for spiritual attainment as well as a morphological study. Indians found a way to salvation in the study of *Sabdha* (the word). *Sabdha-sadhana* was a means to perfect bliss and pure consciousness. "In the thinking of the archaic Indian world the supreme mythic reality is sacrifice, the symbolic act thus becoming the paradigmatic reality everything refers to, every act, every process, be it the creation of the world or the human psychophysical experience. The semantic nature of the supreme mythic reality in India is confined by the presence of a consistent doctrine of the Logos (*Akṣara*, *Vāk*, *Sabdabrahma*) starting in Veda... The Philosophy of Indian grammar is closely linked to this 'semantic emanationism'".<sup>5</sup>

The syntactical relations especially the six declensional cases were understood from the most elaborate and symbolic actions of the sacrifice. The agent, the object, the instrument, the location, the bestowal and the oblation are semantic segmentations of the idea of the action. The sacrificer is the agent (*karta*), the victim is the object (*karma*), the sacrificial area is the location (*adhikarana*), the oblation (*upādāna*) the dative case, the institutor, the instrumental case (*hetu*). Abhinavagupta identifies the six *kāraṅkas* with the Lord (*Īśvara*) by means of correspondences existing between the former and the elements of sacrifice to which they are closely akin.<sup>6</sup> Bhartrhari assimilates *kāraṅka* to *Sakti* - the power of Brahman (VP. 3. 7).

## The philosophy of the grammar of the Vak

It will not be without interest to collate and compare, at least briefly, some ancient texts which refer to the question of

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4. *Sādhana* - means to attain spiritual perfection.

5. Sergiu Al-George, "Extra Linguistic Origin of Pāṇiniyan Syntax" *JOI*, Baroda, Vol 16, no. 1, p. 4.

6. Sergiu Al-George *op. cit.* p. 5.



grammatical philosophy. In the Rgveda (RV)<sup>7</sup> it is evident, that there was already a great interest in the understanding of the Word (*Vak*) especially in its connection with Brahman; for it was by means of the *Vāk* that the Vedic seer (*Rṣi* or *Kavi*) tried to express his thought. In other words, the *Vāk* seems to express Brahman entirely by being virtually identical with it (RV 10. 71. 4; VP I. 5). The extensions of the word correspond with those of Brahman.<sup>8</sup> In RV 1. 164. 35 the holder of Brahman, the Brahmin, is the supreme seat of the *Vāk*. It is identified with mind, matter, and *Prajapati* (RV. 10. 25). As the other self of *Prajāpati*, speech functioned as the source of the universe, it is the active power of Brahman; it is the productive principle. In YV the Vak is the female principle, with *Prajāpati* named as *Vacaspati*: The primeval water came from the *Vāk*.<sup>9</sup> *Vāk* was the 'nivid' of the twelve syllables which emanated from *Prajāpati* while he was performing sacrifice, and it was through the *Vāk* that *Prajāpati* created all things.<sup>10</sup> The gods produced the divine Word (RV 8. 100. 10). The Word is *Sarasvati* herself (RV. 6. 61. 1-2). The Word glorifies herself as the primordial principle of the world. It sustains... orders... seizes all the worlds.<sup>11</sup>

Self is defined as comprising *Manas*, *Prāṇa* and the *Vāk*, the basic triad (S. B. XIV, 4-3-10). The *pancabhūtas* are equal to the *Vāk*. *Manas* became the *pancakośas* - five sheaths, *Prāṇa* the five *prāṇas* and the *Vāk* the *pancabhutas* (the five elements). *Vāk* is the vedic term for the five elements of matter. Life, Mind and Matter were the complete Vedic formula for the principle of consciousness as it was evolved, or descended, into matter.<sup>12</sup>

7. RV = Rgveda; AV = Atharva Veda; YV = Ya jur Veda.

8. *Yāvad Brahma visthitam tāvati Vāk* (RV 10.114. 8).

9. RV 1.184; *Satapathabrāhmaṇa* 6.1. 9; *Pancaviṃsa* 6. 1. 3; 10. 2. 1, 20. 14. 2; *Kaṭhaka* 12. 5, 27. 1; *Vyāsaśamhita* 9. 1.

10. Aitareya 10. 1; Cf. C. Raghavan Pillai, *Vākya padīya*, vol. 1, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1976, p. xi, xii.

11. Cf. D. S. Ruegg, *Contributions A L'Histoire De La Philosophie Linguistique Indienne*, E De Boccard, Editeur, Paris 1959, p. 20

12. Cf. W. Norman Brown, *Agni, Sun, Sacrifice and Vāk: A Sacerdotal Ode to Dirghatamas* (RV 1, 164) JAOS, vol. 88. No. 2, April-June 1968.



As time went on the *Vāk* gained importance as “primeval motherhood” or the productive potency of the transcendent Being on the plane of matter. It was coeval in meaning with the latter *Prakṛti*, the womb (*yonī*) of all that comes into existence and even that which existed prior to creation proper. The *Vāk* is described as a goddess in RV. 10. 125. According to the later *Brāhmaṇa* writers the *Vāk* is equivalent to Agni. The *Vāk* is composed of thousand syllables (RV 1. 164. 41) each of which is equivalent to a step of the movement of the goddess.<sup>13</sup> The transcendent *Vāk* existing in the highest Empyrean is virtually the same as the meaning prior to her becoming differentiated and materialised as Word.

“If we look at *Vāk* from her source in Brahman, she is stated to be four-footed like Brahman himself. The three steps exist in the Unmanifest and the fourth one as the cosmos; but if we look at her emanation from below, her three steps are exemplified in matter which is virtually the three-fold cosmos and thus *Vāk* corresponds to the three ‘Fires of *Yajña*’ where she is present in the form of the priest or three vedas”.<sup>14</sup>

In RV 1. 164 *Vāk* is regarded as the One from which everything came into being (Jn 1:3). *Vāk* teaches the sacrificial rituals to Agni. *Vāk* is the One Real (*ekam Sat*). From her emanated the unorganized material of the universe and the sacrificial rituals needed to organize it. The Supreme authority in the universe is *Vāk*. She poses all syllables (*akṣaras*). The cosmic structure is in *Vāk* though nothing is said about the origin of *Vāk*. *Vāk* created the tumultuous chaotic floods (*salilāni*), the heavenly oceans and the syllables from which the whole universe came into being. Again, *Vāk* is received when Agni approaches for sacrifice. The necessity of *Vāk* is felt in this context. The *Brāhmaṇa* priest is the highest heaven of *Vāk* (1-146-35). Whenever the *Vāk* gives blessings it is a real blessing. “Whenever I give my favours to him, I make him powerful, a true knower of mystical powers, a *Ṛṣi*, a successful sacrificer” (RV 10. 125. 5).

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13. Cf. Agrawala V. S., *The Traditional Approach to Vedic Interpretation*. Proceedings of the 26th International Congress of Orientalist BORI, Poona 1964, p. 6-7 passim.

14. Agrawala *op. cit.* p. 7.



Patanjali and Bhartṛhari start from the Vedic basis. Their thoughts about grammar and nature of *Vāk* transcended the field of morphology and ended in metaphysics. Patanjali in his first chapter mainly deals with the philosophical aspect of language and Bhartṛhari's thoughts about the *śabda* won for him the title of the philosopher of language *par excellence* of India. Being monists, the grammarians thought about the reality of *Vāk* hidden in *varṇās* and reached Brahman who is Pure Consciousness, the manifestation of which is *Vāk*. Through *Vāk* comes *sphota*, the eternal indivisible sense. This *sphota* identified with Brahman, Pure Consciousness, gives the whole mysticism of grammar.<sup>15</sup> If we know the syllables we know Brahman (*vārtika*). That may be the reason why even the gods wanted to learn grammar! Indra studied under Brhaspati!

### Spiritual powers of the Vak

How can grammar have the spiritual power to uplift man? Patanjali found the goal of all ultimate quests in words. *Śabda* or eternal *verbum* is the object of study. We study grammar to attain similarity with God in his greatness (RV 10.6.71). It is *Śabdopāsana*. The underlying mysticism in *Vāk* is that it is not mere sound but the manifestation of consciousness or its vivid materialization. It is consciousness that splits into *Śabda* and *artha* – sound and sense – the *Caitanya* within, the internal life principle. *Śabdabrahma* is coexistent with *Parabrahma*. “The Word was with God” (Jn 1:1). He who knows *Śabdabrahma* knows *Parabrahma*.<sup>16</sup> So the use of words has religious merit (Bha. 1.1.1.).<sup>17</sup> For merit one needs to use the real, the purest form of speech which is beyond the reach of ordinary man. So *Upāsana* and *Sādhana* are needed to know this.<sup>18</sup> To him she reveals her nature (RV 10.6.71). The *Chāndokyopanishad* says that one should serve *Vāk* as it is *Brahman* (VII. 2). Patanjali followed the Upaniṣadic teaching.<sup>19</sup>

15. Kaundabhatta, *Vaiyākaranabhūṣaṇa* 74.

16. *Tripurātāpaniyanishad*. 5. 17.

17. All the references in *Mahabhaṣya* of Patanjali are given from the Kielhorn edition, *Vols. I-III*, BORI, Poona.

18. *Upāsana* = continued effort; *Sādhana* = means of attainment.

19. Patanjali, *Yogasūtra*, 1. 27, 28,



The *Sabdādvaita* of Bhartṛhari is clear from the following stanzas. "Brahman who is without beginning or end, whose very essence is the Word, who is the cause of the manifested phonemes, who appears as the objects, from whom creation of the world proceeds" (VP 1.1). "Knowers of tradition (the Vedas) have declared that all this is the transformation of the Word. It is from the *chandās* that the Universe has evolved (Up 1.120, cfr. Jn 1:1-3) Ait Br. 4.21.1 also identifies Vāk with Brahman. Also in *Vākya-padiya* we find Vṛttis also doing this (1.120,112,1.130). In the RV *Vāk* identifies herself with everything in the universe implying that it is *Vāk* which manifests itself as everything (RV 10.125; 4.58.3). *Sabdatatva* and *Brahmatatva* are interchangeable. This is the highest means to truth. *Sabdatatva* is the same as Brahman to the Vedantins. The world is the manifestation of *Sabda*.<sup>20</sup>

The cause must be in some way reflected in the effect. All manifestations of Brahman are intertwined with the Word and so it is concluded that their root cause, Brahman, must be of the nature of the Word. That is, it must be *Sabdatatva* (VP I. 115-123; VP 1.P.6.1.7.1; P.14.1-3). Brahman is the Word-principle because all that Brahman creates has the form of the Word. If knowledge were not of the nature of *Vāk*, that light would not illuminate at all. *Vāk* is that which causes recognition and identification (VP I. 124). Knowledge will not be the knowledge which illuminates unless it is of the nature of *Vāk*. Hari identifies Consciousness and the word (I. 26). This Consciousness (*citi*) is the Supreme Word (*para vāk*), Spontaneous and Eternal. It is absolute self-sufficiency, it is the Omnipotence of the Supreme Self.<sup>21</sup> Man wants union (*sāyujya*) with the Word. The purification of the word is the means of union with the Supreme. Through the study of grammar we purify the Word.<sup>22</sup> So Bhartṛhari says that grammar is a *smṛti* and an *agama* (VP I. 129, 142, 3.3.30), a door to beatitude, a door to learning, attainment of the Supreme

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20. VP 2. 31 Ait. Br 6. 3; M. S. 2. 2. 10; *Bhagavata* 16. 16. 51: 11, 21. 36-40; 11. 12. 17-18; *Manjusha* p. 183.

21. VP. P. 106-7, VP I P. 199. 1. 5-6; Utpala *Īśvarapratya-bhijñānakāṇika*, V. 11, 13. VP. 1. p. 201. 1. 6-7, VP. 1. p. 51. 1. 5-6.

22. Cf. K. A. Subramanya Iyer, Bhartṛhari, Deccan College, Poona, 1969, p. 98-101, 450-52.



Being (VP I. 14,22). According to the power of *Sabda* the power of divine light is accepted (VP I. 121). *Sabda* is permanent (*akṣara*).<sup>23</sup>

*Sabdopāśana* is perfected only when one finds identity with the *Sabdatatva*, the Word-principle. The Word is divided into four parts: in RV and AV.<sup>24</sup> These divisions are given different interpretations by different schools in accordance with their subject of study. They are *Parā*, *Paśyanti*, *Madhyama* and *Vaikāri*. *Vaikāri* is the spoken word which we hear, *Madhyama* is that which is about to be spoken and is already in relation with *Prāṇa*, the air that utters it. *Paśyanti* is that which is beyond the reach of *Prāṇa*, and mind alone is its substratum. *Parā* is the undifferentiated inconceivable hidden Supreme Word. He who identifies himself with this word is one with Brahman.

In AV 7.1.1 we find an indication of the four stages in the interior realization of the poet which ends in the "fourth" (*turiya*) stage, namely, Brahman. That progression through four degrees, is found in the art of Vedic *Kavi*, deserves our attention because it has analogies with the exteriorization of an intuition. Those stages through which the Vedic poet passes in the formulation of his thought recall, *mutatis mutandis*, the functions of the four degrees of the "ascent" of the Word among the philosophers of grammar; for Bhartṛhari it is the question of the formulation of the concretization of an intuition (*pratibha*) of the Pure Conscience. The Pure Conscience is Brahman itself.<sup>25</sup>

The attribution of sacredness to *Vāk* is found in all religions especially Hinduism and Christianity. *Vāk* is the manifested expression of the eternal divine Ideation. Let us use with reverence the divine manifestation called the Word and let us be reborn of the Word (I Peter 1:23; James 1:21; I Jn 2:4; Jn 1:18).

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23. *Akṣara* is letter as well as the "Undestructible Brahman" (Bha. 11. 2).

24. RV. 1. 164. 45; AV 9. 10. 27; RV 5. 40. 6; 10. 67. 1; RV 10. 90. 3; 1. 155. 5; 8. 100. 10; AV 7. 1. 1.

25. D. S. Ruegg, *op. cit.* p. 21 *passim*. Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuitions in Art and Poetry*, New American Library, New York 1974, p. 219-220.



# Sadhana: Hindu and Christian

## The Concept of sadhana

The word *sādhana* literally denotes “the means” by which an end is attained (*sādhyaṭe anena iti*). It is commonly and somewhat ambiguously translated as “spiritual discipline” or “spiritual practice”. In Hindu religious literature, it actually refers to the various types of human endeavour towards attainment of direct supersensuous experience of the Ultimate Reality—either the Personal God or the Super-personal Absolute. This direct experience is called *sākṣhātkāra* or *aparokṣhānubhūti*. In non-Hindu religions, this higher experience of God, and the methods of attaining it, form a special branch of religion known as Mysticism in Christianity, Sufism in Islam and Cabbala and Hasidism in Judaism. In Hinduism mystical life is not a branch but the main trunk, and *sādhana* its very heart.

*Sādhana* is the central theme of all the important books of the Hindu religion: the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavad Gita, the Purāṇas, the ethical code of Manu, popular treatises on religion, folk songs, and even some of the books on Sanskrit grammar. The very word *darśana* which is used for philosophy, means “seeing”, and implies direct experience of Reality; and such a *darśan* forms the essence of *sādhana* according to the Upaniṣads.

In Christianity in contrast to Hinduism, Christian religious literature is divided into four groups: *Dogmatic Theology* (which deals with the Blessed Trinity, the Incarnation, the Redemption, the Sacraments and eschatology), *Moral Theology* (which deals with human acts, revealed precepts and counsels, grace, and Christian virtues), *Ascetical Theology* (which deals with mortification and exercises of piety) and *Mystical Theology* (which deals with supernatural contemplation and union with God). In the celebrated *Summa* of St. Thomas Aquinas the first two are treated as one unit. According to Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, ascetical and mystical theology too form one indivisible unit which is nothing



but the practical application of dogmatic-moral theology.<sup>1</sup> This is exactly what the Hindu term *sādhana* means: *asceticism* and *mysticism* taken together.

### Personal salvation in Hinduism

The Hindu concept of personality is trichotomous. Almost all schools of Hindu tradition, including even the *Vaiśeṣikas* who are atomists, hold that the soul (*jīva* or *jīvātman*) is separate not only from the body but also from the mind (*antahkaraṇa*). This soul is not created by God but is coeval with Him, and all souls are essentially identical. All schools except *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* hold that the soul (and not the mind) is the locus of consciousness; the *Vādānta* schools further believe that the soul is also the locus of happiness.<sup>2</sup> Lastly, in those schools which believe in God, the soul is considered either to be one with God or similar to Him in essence. Owing to the eclipsing power of *Māya*, or primordial ignorance according to Sankara or owing to contraction of its inherent consciousness according to Ramanuja<sup>3</sup>, the soul remains imprisoned, as it were, in the physical body and is prevented from enjoying its own bliss (*naija sukhānubhūti*). This is the root cause of man's suffering.

The goal of life is total freedom from all sorrow and the attainment of supreme bliss, and this is gained by the destruction of ignorance draping or limiting the soul.<sup>4</sup> Destruction of ignorance is possible only through self-realization i. e. mystical experience of the higher dimensions of the self. In the non-dualist school of Sankara self-realization means God-realization, as the self in its pure state is not different from Brahman or God. Ramanuja, however, makes a distinction between the self and God,

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1. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Contemplation and Perfection* (London: B. Herder Book Co., 1958) p. 13

2. Cf. Symposium on the nature of soul in *Vedānta Kesari* (a monthly journal, published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, May, 1965)

3. M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1958) pp. 405-406

4. Swami Madhavananda, *Vedānta Paribhasha* (Calcutta: R. K. Mission, Sarada Pitha, Belur, 1953) p. 209



and holds that self-realization (*atmāvalōkana*)<sup>5</sup> must be followed by God-realization. For this the grace of God is essential. But according to him love of God is a special kind of knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Thus salvation according to Hinduism must be preceded by an epistemological transformation in man. Morality and ethical changes in man are valuable because they are primary pre-conditions for this cognitive transformation in man. Even when God's grace is sought, its purpose is to bring about this interior transformation. God first gives the devotee knowledge of Him, and then salvation.

Salvation in Hinduism is not a reconciliation of man with God through atonement and faith as it is in Christianity and Judaism. It means going one step further and meeting the Divine right now in this world. That is why mystical experience has paramount importance in the life of a Hindu. This does not, however, mean that morality has no place in a Hindu's life as some Western critics allege. It only means that morality is preparatory to God-experience which is final. Everything else is subordinate to that one supreme God who is the Self of all selves. Until the supreme God-experience takes place the soul is born again and again.

### The Christian conception of soul and salvation

The Christian concept of personality is dichotomous. St. Augustine believed in the Platonic dualism of body and soul. St. Thomas Aquinas introduced the Aristotelean concept of the integral nature of soul and body which are the complementary expressions of one unity of personality.<sup>7</sup> The soul is created by God along with the body, and though man is made in the image of God and is endowed with will and reason he is, like all other creatures, under the rule and mercy of God. Christianity therefore gives greater importance to the nature of God than to the soul, to God's grace than to self-effort. The gap between the

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5. Ramanujacharya, *Gita Bhāshya* IV 24 & VI. 1

6. *Bhakti Jnana visesha eva ca*, cf. Ramanuja, *Vedārtha Samgraha* (Mysore: Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, 1972) p. 198 & 219

7. S. E. Frost, *The Basic Teachings of the Great Philosophers* (New York: New Home Library, 1941) p. 181



Creator and the creature is filled by the Logos who was made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ at a particular time in history. Hence the search for the true "image of man" in Christianity as against the search for the "true self" in Hinduism.

The Thomist view of soul makes it analogous to the "subtle body" (*sūkṣma śarīra*) in Hinduism. This means that the Characteristics of *atman* which we have enumerated can only belong to God. In fact Aristotle taught that one part of the soul called "creative reason" is actually a part of God, and after death simply returns to Him. Though Aquinas rejected this view several Christian mystics, especially St. John of the Cross and St. Theresa, have spoken about a part of the soul which is untouched by concupiscence.<sup>8</sup> Vedanta teaches that "an eternal portion of God becoming the soul in the living world illumines the mind and senses."<sup>9</sup>

The Christian view of salvation is essentially the same as that of Judaism<sup>10</sup> modified by Christ's mediation. The soul after death goes either to heaven or hell (or temporarily to a purgatory, in the Catholic view). Faith in God, good works, atonement, the Sacraaments, are the means for attaining heaven, open to all virtuous, believing Christians. Evidently, in this scheme of salvation, mystical experience has no place and ethical life is paramount. Mystical experience when it comes to anyone is a gift of special divine grace, and its aim is greater moral perfection. Though this is the generally accepted view, there have been great men and women who could not remain satisfied with a merely ethical life but tried with faith in the Divine promise to seek the Divine presence in the depths of their souls. In fact, the thirteenth century "Prince of Mystical Theologians", St. Bonaventure, says that this mystical state must be made *lex communis*, a general rule for all and not for a few specially gifted people.

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8. Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (London: Methuen & Co., 1949) pp. 49, 54

9. *Bhagavad Githa* XV. 7

10. Charles Braden, *Man's Quest for Salvation* (New York: Willet, Clark & Co., 1941) p. 140 ff.



The great St. Thomas Aquinas himself speaks of mystical experience. As is well known, he left his celebrated *Summa Theologica* incomplete because the wonderful mystical experience he got towards the end of his life revealed to him truths far deeper than his intellect had understood. While discussing prophecy and visions<sup>11</sup> he speaks about three ways in which God can communicate truth to man, the highest of which is intellectual vision (*lumen sapientiae*). This is the kind of knowledge that angels in heaven have and also Adam had before his fall. Divine grace restores this consciousness to men during mystical contemplation. He further says that there is a still higher kind of experience of God, when He is seen as He really is, and the blessed participate, in their measure in the act of God's knowing Himself without a medium, and are united to Him. This beatific vision (*lumen glorie*) was possible in this life only for Christ and the Blessed Virgin, while it is the goal of the virtuous after their death. The Christian concept of salvation thus ends in the promise of the supreme glory.

### Ascetical discipline of sadhana

Asceticism is said to be the foundation of mysticism, and anybody who hopes to understand the latter without the former runs the risk of getting bogged down in the mire of self-love which all great mystics have warned men against. Speaking about mystical experience, St. John of the Cross, one of the supreme mystics of all times, asks: "Why is it that so few ever attain to this state?" He proceeds to the answer: The reason is that, in this marvellous work which God Himself begins, so many are weak, shrinking from trouble, and unwilling to endure the least discomfort or mortification, or to labour with constant patience".<sup>12</sup> "I am the food of the full grown," the Divine Voice told St. Augustine, "Grow and feed on Me."<sup>13</sup> Mystical life is only for those spiritual adults whose staple diet is self-control and discipline.

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11. *Summa Theologica*, II, ii, cl, xxx.

12. St. John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*, Trans. David Lewis (London: Thomas Baker 1919) p. 47

13. Quoted by Evelyn Underhill in *Concerning the Inner Life* (London, Methuen & Co., 1926) p. 43



In Hinduism every school of thought has its own code of preliminary ethical disciplines. For Patanjali it is *yama* and *niyama*, for Sankara it is *sādhana catuṣṭaya*, for Ramanuja it is *Sādhana saptaka*,<sup>14</sup> and so on. This intimate connection between the ascetical and the mystical life has been neglected in some of the new-fangled manifestations of Hinduism which are becoming popular in the West, and this makes them highly suspect. For there are no short-cuts to mystical experience.

### Classification of sadhana in Hinduism

The modern classification into four *yogas* - *Karma yoga*, *Raja yoga*, *Bhakti yoga* and *Jñāna yoga* - was popularized by Swami Vivekananda in his books bearing these titles and also elsewhere in his *Complete Works*. The original classification of Shri Sankaracharya, in the order of superiority, was into *Karma*, *Upāsana* and *Jñāna*. Ramanuja's ascending series was *Karma* - *Jñāna* - *Bhakti*. Ever since Ramanuja's time there has been, for centuries, an unending controversy over the relative superiority of devotion (*Bhakti*) and knowledge (*Jñāna*). Even the statement of Ramanuja that "Bhakti is a special kind of knowledge"<sup>15</sup> seems to have been overlooked. It is only in the teachings of the modern saint Shri Ramakrishna that the two view-points have been reconciled.

What is common to all the systems of ancient India is the low status given to *Karma*. It is true that during the early Vedic period *Karma*, meaning sacrifices, had an important place in life. The Mimamsakas, of course, gave it a philosophical status, but their view of *Karma* as Vedic rituals divinely ordained, to be performed by all people, never got a respectable status especially after its crushing defeat at the hand of Sankaracharya.<sup>16</sup> The

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14. Dr. N. S. Anantharangachar, *The Philosophy of Sadhana in Visishtadvaita* (Mysore: Prasaraṅga, University of Mysore, 1967) p. 154

15. *Vedārtha Samgraha*, Translated into English by S. S. Raghavachar (Mysore, Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, 1971) pp. 198 & 219

16. For an excellent discussion of *Karma* as a spiritual discipline, see Nalini Kanta Brahma, *Philosophy of Hindu Sadhana* (London, Kegan Paul, Trench. Trubner & Co., 1932) pp. 92-125



purpose of *Karma yoga*, according to the school of Sankara, is only purification of mind. Ramanuja concedes further that it may also lead to the discovery of the individual self (*ātmāvalokana*).<sup>17</sup> All Vedantic teachers are agreed that *Karma* can never bring man the highest realization and hence liberation. *Karma*, thus interpreted, seems to correspond to the purgative way of Christian mystics. What is common to both Christian and Hindu views is the detachment of will from sense-objects, the killing of "self-love", the purgation of the soul.

It should be mentioned here that in modern times Swami Vivekananda reinterpreted *Karma* as service of God for man, and made it an unavoidable necessity in the life of a spiritual aspirant. In the changing social milieu of modern India this idea seems to be fast gaining ground.

### Classification of *sādhana* in Christianity

St. Augustine made a distinction between the beginners, the proficient, and the perfect, who according to the terminology of Dionysius the Areopagite correspond to the Purgative, Illuminative and Unitive ways. There is a tendency among certain writers to treat these three ways as independent paths of ascetical life, suited to different temperaments. Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, however, points out that these are actually three stages in the true mystical path, and should not be confused with imperfect commonplace ideas of the spiritual life. This is also the view of Evelyn Underhill, one of the foremost modern authorities on mysticism. She speaks of the "Mystic Way" as consisting of five stages: the Awakening of the self, Purgation, Illumination, the Dark Night of the soul and the final Union.<sup>18</sup>

The more common classification of Christian *sādhana* is into "meditation," "prayer" and "contemplation." The twelfth century Carthusian monk Guigo the Angelic (Guigues II) in his little book *Scala Claustalium* was perhaps the first to give systematic treatment of these three "degrees" (to which he prefixed a

17. Anantharangachar, op. cit. pp. 101, 119, 130.

18. Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (London: Methuen & Co. 1949) p. 169



fourth. viz. "reading".<sup>19</sup> In his excellent article on "Mental prayer in the Catholic Tradition" Fr. Paul Philippe O. P. traces the subsequent development of meditation, prayer and contemplation. According to him, "meditation", which originally was a part of *lectio divina*, gradually developed into "Discursive Prayer" which in the hands of Ignatius Loyola became a mental drill or "Practical Prayer" necessary for beginners. What was formerly called "prayer" gradually changed, after the sixteenth century, into "affective prayer" and "prayer of simplicity". In the meantime "contemplation" too was undergoing extension and finally St. Theresa distinguished several stages in it.<sup>20</sup>

The modern tendency in Catholic tradition is to call every kind of intercourse with God "prayer". This is of course in harmony with the original definition, "Prayer is the lifting up of the mind to God", ascribed to the Desert Father Evagrius of Pontus. Thus we have the Liturgical Prayer, the Prayer of Adoration, the Prayer of Thanksgiving, the Vocal Prayer, and, of course, the Mental Prayer, with which we are chiefly concerned here. There are several excellent treatises on Mental Prayer of which *The Graces of Interior Prayer* by Father Poulain and *The Methods of Mental Prayer* by Cardinal Lercaro have been mainly followed in the preparation of the present article. Poulain divides Mental Prayer into two states, active and passive. The active state, otherwise called "Ordinary Prayer," consists of four degrees (1) vocal prayer (which is very often petitionary), (2) meditation or discursive prayer, (3) affective prayer, and (4) the prayer of simplicity (Bossuet), also known as prayer of simple intent (Francois de Sales), prayer of silence (Lallemant), acquired contemplation (Thomas of Jesus) and prayer of active recollection (St. Theresa). The passive state (otherwise known as extraordinary or infused prayer) again consists of four stages: (1) incomplete mystic union or the prayer of quiet (St. Theresa), (2) the full mystic union or the semi-ecstatic union, or prayer of union (St. Theresa), (3) the ecstatic union or spiritual betrothal, and (4) the transforming (St. Theresa) or deifying union or spiritual marriage

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19. James Walsh (Ed.) *Spirituality Through the Centuries* (New York: P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1965) p. 135

20. cf. Francis C. Lenner (Trans.) *Mental Prayer and Modern Life* (New York: P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1950) pp. 1-61



(St. John of the Cross).<sup>21</sup> Father Garigou-Lagrange has prepared a table to fit all these stages within the framework of the three ways –Purgative, Illuminative and Unitive.<sup>22</sup>

### Eastern Christian and Indian mysticism

In this connection it should be pointed out that the Eastern Churches, especially the Greek Orthodox Church, has always favoured a mystical life for monks and laity alike, and is closer to the spirit of the Indian tradition than the Western Churches. The Greek Orthodox Church also has the doctrine of *theosis*, the deification of man through union and participation in divine life. However, Greek theologians (beginning with the three great Cappadocian Fathers) make a distinction between the Divine Essence (which corresponds to the *sat* of Hinduism) and the un-created Divine Energy (which corresponds to the *cit* or *śakti* of Hinduism), and they hold that mystical union and participation involve only the latter. The Divine Essence ever remains inaccessible to the embodied self. St. Basil says: "It is by His energies we say we know our God: we do not say that we can come near to the essence itself, for His energies descend to us, but His essence remains unapproachable".<sup>23</sup>

The Hindu view is that the human soul in its pure, ultimate nature is of the same *essence* as God, and in mystical experience the two are brought together in varying degrees of intimacy. As for the energy of God (the *Śakti* of *Tantras*, the *māya* of non-dualist Vedānta, and the *Prakṛiti* of dualist Vedānta), it is this which creates subtle and gross matter, the mental and physical universes.

### Conclusion

So far the salient features of *sādhana* in Hinduism and Christianity have been discussed, and in the process an attempt has been made to trace their possible meeting-points. In this

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21. cf. Fr. A. Poulsin, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, St. Louis, B. Herder Book Co., 1957

22. Garrigou-Lagrange, op. cit. p. 6

23. Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London, Jame Clarke & Co, 1960)



modern world of incredibly rapid changes, traditional norms and values are breaking down, and there is greater emphasis on individual enrichment and fulfilment. This can only be attained through direct personal experience, and the religions of the world are now being called upon to help millions of people in their individual spiritual quest and adventure. Prof. Rufus Jones remarks :

Two great tendencies come into prominence in the entire course of religious history – the tendency on the one hand, to regard religion as something permanent and unchanging, and on the other hand, the equally fundamental tendency to revivify and reshape religion through fresh and spontaneous experiences. It is natural that both tendencies should appear, for religion is both eternal and temporal – it is the child of permanence and change. No religion can live and be a power in this evolving world unless it changes and adjusts itself to its environment, and no religion can minister to the deepest needs of man unless it reveals permanent and time-transcending Realities.<sup>24</sup>

That is precisely what *sādhana* does for man. It fulfils the individual's quest for perfection and fulfilment and it does this by taking him to the fountain-head of unchanging Reality, viz. God. What is now needed is a greater understanding of the various paths of different religions, and the sharing of the rich treasure of experience which their great spiritual masters have accumulated for the benefit of humanity.

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24. Rufus Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1936 p. 1



# Asceticism: Life - affirming or Life - denying?

## I

### The Hindu Perspective

For the average Westerner the typical Hindu ascetic is the emaciated *sadhu* sitting on a bed of spikes. It is just a caricature of the genuine Hindu ascetic. Hinduism in its pristine purity did not enjoin either mortification of the flesh or retirement into solitude any more than pristine Christianity did. Hinduism did not advocate the destruction of the senses or sense-objects but only control of them.

#### Vedic positivism

The Vedic people seem to have fully enjoyed the good things of life. In the words of Sardar Panikkar: "I do not know whether at any time life in India was organised on the basis of forest retreats. All historical evidence disproves it".<sup>1</sup> Even the *Saptarṣis*, the supreme ideals of renunciation, are described by Kalidasa as being clothed in gold and wearing sacred threads of pearls. Panikkar adds: "Nowhere is materialism so rampant, as in India, nowhere does the struggle for advantage over others have a greater hold on the people than in India".<sup>2</sup> This is also Nirad Chaudhuri's thesis.<sup>3</sup>

There is only a single verse about a *brahmacharia* in the *Rg Veda* and it is repeated in the *Atharva Veda*. There is no work in Sanskrit literature where *sanyāsa* or renunciation is glorified.<sup>4</sup> Practically no ascetic comes on the stage, and if any ascetics are introduced, it is only to engage them in helping

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1. K. M. Panikkar, *Convocation Address at Santhiniketan*

2. *Ibidem*

3. Nirad Chaudhuri, *The Continent of Circe*, passim

4. Cf. Kunjan Raja, *Some Fundamental Problems in Indian Philosophy*, p. 249



active life in the world.<sup>5</sup> In the Vedas, including the Upanishads, there is not the slightest hint that the world and life in the world are a place and a state of bondage and suffering. In all the Upanishads there is not a hint of a *mokṣa* (liberation) as understood in the later thought of Hinduism. There is no thought of *sanyāsa* either.

### Buddhist self-control

Shri Buddha, the greatest rebel against (or opponent of) the Vedic ritualistic religion, never taught a system of passimistic asceticism as some Western scholars have misrepresented him as doing. For the Buddha what is called suffering *duhkha* is only a temporary phase of life, which occurs when man deviates from his normal relationship with the world. This normal relationship is moderate involvement in worldly affairs. Any inordinate involvement is a bondage or an attachment. Man's supreme happiness consists in *nirvāṇa* which is a state of consciousness in man when he realizes his *kevalatva*: simplicity or purity. This simplicity can be achieved as a supreme form of spiritual joy even in this life.<sup>6</sup>

The right path to happiness in this life is "moderation" in the use of earthly things. This is the "golden mean" of Buddhism known as the Middle Way. It consists in self-control which is an active, free and creative operation of mind. It is a level of consciousness which orients life positively towards worldly realities. In order to live long, and to achieve *nirvāṇa*, in peace one should be moderate in everything. One who has achieved this state of mind is a really noble person (*brāhman*). The Buddha says: "Him who, having cut off all fetters, verily does not have any fear, who has gone beyond attachments well controlled, him I call a *brāhman*."<sup>7</sup> The Tathagatha adds: "Him, in whom attachment and enmity, conceit and cant have dropped off like a mustard seed from a needle point, him I call a *brāhman*".<sup>8</sup> Obviously it is self-control that he extols as the *sādhana* for

5. Kunjan Raja, *Op. Cit.*, loc. cit

6. Kunjan Raja, *Op. Cit.*, p. 252

7. *Dhammapada*, XXVI, 15

8. *Dhammapada*, XXVI, 25



*nirvāṇa*. This is a spiritual means leading man to a spiritual goal which is highly sublime and positive. The *sādhana* of self-control promotes life and does not demote its development. Such is the Buddhist ideal of spirituality, though evolved as a reaction denying life.

### The positive values of personal growth (ashramas)

Apparently there is a misunderstanding that man's personal growth, understood in terms of *āśramas* (stations of life) in the Hindu tradition, is life-denying especially at the stages of *vānaprastha* and *sanyāsa*. As a matter of history, however, the last two stages of the *āśramas* are of very last origin in the Hindu way of life. They are understood as stages of fulfilment (completion) and not as stages of refusing to 'live' or of escaping from the realities of life. It is true that at these stages man withdraws from active involvement in worldly matters, but not to condemn them. Rather, the involvement took the shape of *samvādas* (dialogues) at the house of the preceptors and in the palaces of kings. Not a single sage who participated in these debates lived in the forest, not one came from the forest for such discussions and returned to his forest-home after the debates. True, we come across forest-dwellers in the epics, but they lived a happy married life, enjoying the good things around them. These *ṛṣis* had considerable wealth, else how could they entertain kings for days? There were *sanyasis* but they lived in cities, often attached to temples or in monasteries. Indian literature does not record the experience of anyone having attained *mokṣa*. Yudhistira and his brothers went up to heaven and are not known to have attained *mokṣa*. The two famous epics speak of *Ciranjivis* or persons with eternal life, like Vyasa, but *mokṣa* is denied to them. According to Saccidananda Murti the basic philosophy of life of the early Indians was "positivistic, life-affirming, and aggressive".<sup>9</sup>

As regards celibacy the Jabālopanishad says: "Let a man become a householder after he has completed studentship". According to Manu, "low shall he fall" who seeks beatitude without having discharged the debt to one's ancestors by begetting a male



child.<sup>10</sup> The impossibility of women going to heaven unless their vile bodies were purified by rite of marriage, was stressed in the *Mahabhārata*.<sup>11</sup> The celibate female ascetic Kunigarga gained much merit by her asceticism. But Narada told her that she would not attain heavenly bliss unless she married. The sage Sringavat volunteered to marry her under two conditions: she should surrender to him half her merits and cohabit with him just for one day. She agreed to his proposals. Though a few early Upanishadic texts refer to *naiṣṭika brahmacarya* (life-long celibacy) the *Aditya Purana* has a very low estimation of celibacy when it says: "In the *Kali Yuga* (our present epoch) both men and women are addicted to sin: such as a studentship continued for a very long time". We may clinch this issue with a text from the *Mahabharata*: The *Sāntiparva* says: "O Bharata, what need has a self-controlled man of the forest, and what use is the forest to an uncontrolled man? Wherever a self-controlled man dwells, that is a forest, that is a hermitage".<sup>12</sup> And the *Vanaparva* adds: "A sage, even though he remains in this house, dressed in fine apparel, if only always pure and full of love, as long as life lasts, becomes freed from all evils." This is indeed genuine Hindu asceticism. We read in another text: "The hermitage is not the cause of virtue; virtue arises only when practised".<sup>13</sup>

The Indian ascetic is called a *tāpasvin*, *sanyāsin* and *yogin*. The term *tapas*, usually translated as "mortification" of the flesh is found in the *Rg Veda*; but it literally means "glow", or "burning", and was suggestive of spiritual enlightenment. This term, no doubt, presupposes self-control. But its association with cruel bodily mortification, such as was practised by the corpse-eating Kapalikas, and the Kalamukhas, is highly suggestive of degenerated asceticism.

### The Gita sublimation

Extreme forms of asceticism were denounced as most reprehensible in the Gita. Sri Krishna advised: "Those men who

10. *Manu*, VI, 35

11. Cf. *Mahabharata*, quoted by P. Thomas in *Indian women Through The Ages*, p. 169

12. *Mahabharata*, *Santiparvan*, 5961

13. *Yajnavalka Smṛity* III, 65



practise violent austerities not enjoined in the Scriptures, given to hypocrisy and egoism, impelled by the force of lust and attachment, fools that they are, they torture their bodily organs, and Me, too, who dwell within the body, know that they are *Asurika* (demoniacal) in their resolve".<sup>14</sup> The Gita further gives us the correct idea of *tapas*: "Worship of the gods, of the twice-born, of teachers and of the wise, purity, uprightness, continence, and non-injury – these are said to be the austerity (*tapas*) of the body. The speech which causes no excitement, which is truthful, pleasant and beneficial and also the practice of sacred recitation (of Scriptures) – these are said to form the austerity (*tapas*) of speech. Serenity of mind, gentleness, silence, self-control, and purity of disposition – this is called mental austerity (*tapas*)."<sup>15</sup> It is not mortification of the flesh, says Bhishma to Yudhistira, that constitutes true penance. It is truthfulness of speech, benevolence, compassion and abstention from injury to others, which are regarded by the wise as true penance.

According to the Bhagavadgita, the disciplined *yogi*, moving among objects with his senses under control and free from attraction and aversion, acquires tranquillity.<sup>16</sup> We are not asked to extinguish all desires, as some Western critics of the Gita erroneously think. To destroy all desire would mean the cessation of all activity which is absolutely impossible. Krishna, in fact, urges Arjuna to an active life.<sup>17</sup> No doubt the desires and passions are described as very powerful and inimical to man, trying impetuously as they do, to carry away the heart even of a prudent man who strives to restrain them.<sup>18</sup> According to the Gita, our passions and desires must be converted and sublimated, and then these enemies become our friends for doing good: "Let him raise the self by the self and not let the self become depressed; for verily is the Self the friend of the self."<sup>19</sup>

### The yogic moderation

The whole path of Yoga breathes a spirit of moderation through exercise such as may be helpful to concentration of the mind and a proper meditation on the Supreme Being instead of

14. *Gita*, XVII, 5-6

16. *Gita*, II, 67

18. *Gita*, II, 60

15. *Gita*, XVII, 14-16

17. *Gita*, III, 4-7

19. *Gita*, VI, 5-6



causing bodily pain and distraction of attention. Patanjali is very particular about pointing out that the posture for meditation should be a pleasant one – *sthira sukham āsanam*. A *yogin*, says Sri Krishna, should always avoid the two extremes of excess and abstinence: “Yoga is not possible for him who eats too much or for him who abstains too much from eating; it is not for him, O Arjuna, who sleeps too much or too little. For him, who is moderate in eating and recreation, temperate in his action, who is regulated in sleep and wakefulness, Yoga becomes the destroyer of pain”. Excessive mortification belongs to the school of *Hatā Yoga*. The uncultured practise it with a view to acquiring extraordinary powers called *siddhis*. The author of the *Jivanmukti viveka* says that the ascetic who thus occupies himself, “swerves away from the real aim of existence”.

### The Hindu synthesis

According to Sankara the Advaitin, it is the mind (*manas*) that creates the objects of desire and gives rise to egoism and attachment to things earthly, and these make man a ceaseless wanderer in this phenomenal world, *Samsāra*. The pursuit of external objects being checked, evil desires are subjugated, tranquillity of the mind results, and thence arises the vision of the Absolute Being. According to the *Mahabharata* the ideal sage is the one who behaves towards all creatures as if he is their kinsman, who has acquired the knowledge of the Supreme Spirit, who is free from all passions and is absorbed in the knowledge of the Self, he who is compassionate, whom all creatures have ceased to fear, who abstains from injuring others in thought, speech and deed, he who is free from the bondage of desire, he into whose mind all sorts of desires enter like diverse streams falling into the ocean without being able to transcend the limits by their discharge – it is such a one who gains peace – not he who cherishes desires for earthly things.

## II

### The Christian Perspective

#### An eschatological spirituality

It is an undeniable fact that the eschatological language of the early Church, with its stress on the imminence of Christ's



second coming, gave a tremendous impetus to moral conduct. The belief in a millennium had an extraordinary hold on the mind of the [early Christians. In some sayings of Christ, the future kingdom is introduced suddenly and is catastrophic. Christ's disciples had no celestial language, and perhaps to Christ himself there was open only the inadequate language of his time – metaphors and parable imagery, which are typical of the apocalyptic paradigm. We see in Christ's language a picture of truth, not a reference to actual future events but a picture of His *present* and continuous judgement. At any rate, a good amount of eschatological colouring has been given to Christ's words by His reporters.<sup>20</sup> But even if we remove all the eschatological imagery, Christ's ethics remain unchanged. It is wrong to describe early Christianity as an "eschatological community", totally cut off from this world and awaiting the day of doom. The Apostles did catch the spiritual sense of Christ's message, as is evident from the *Acts* where the main stress is not eschatological. But extremists like Tertullian and Montanus played havoc with their views. Much of the severe ascetical discipline of early Christianity was predicated on the early return of Christ<sup>21</sup>. The thought of the *parousia* (the second coming of Christ) made the early Christians subdue desire with fasts and varied chastisements.<sup>22</sup> When chaos threatened the Roman Empire at the end of the second century, Tertullian and others thought that the end of the world was at hand.<sup>23</sup> A Syrian Bishop even led his flock into the desert to meet Christ.

### Origins of Christian pessimism

During the disastrous banishment of the Jews into Babylonian captivity, there grew up a *corpus* of apocalyptic writings under Persian and Babylonian influence. By the second century B. C. the mutual interpenetration of Judaism and Zoroastrianism had gone to such lengths that modern Western scholars find the utmost difficulty in determining and disentangling the respective contributions that these two sources made to the stream which

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20. Cf. Streeter, *Oxford Studies in the Synoptic Problem*

21. Cf. Tertullian: *De Jejuniis*

22. Cf. Tert., *De Spectaculis*

23. Cf. Tert., 'Ad Uxorem', 1, 5



was fed by their united waters.<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, a cosmic eschatology replaced the Jewish nationalistic hope and the Jewish world-view was modified along the lines of a pessimistic dualism between the powers of Light and Darkness. The latter was to be vanquished by asceticism. Plato had already entered Jewish thought through Philo of Alexandria. The classical aesthetic Greeks had despised asceticism. But when they came under the Roman yoke, the homeless Greek culture found refuge, just where India found it, in ascetic despondency and theosophic speculation. The Christian Philosophical school of Alexandria (*Didascalía*) did not escape the infection of the pessimistic Neo-Platonist spirituality and Stoic ethics. Its influence on St. Augustine especially had disastrous consequences. The entire course of Christian spirituality was coloured by Augustinian pessimism. Augustine had not fully banished Manicheism from his mind.<sup>25</sup> Under the Manichean scheme of the world, God and the world were definitely contrary to each other. Dualistic asceticism is a theological view which believes that matter is evil and that the spiritual element alone is good. Here, the word, "asceticism" loses its original meaning of "training" the body (*askesis*) and acquires the meaning of "extinction". The body is to be destroyed so that the spirit may be freed from it.<sup>26</sup> It is a metaphysical dualism that separates soul and body, God and the world, and spirit and matter as sharply contrasted realities. It establishes a double standard of holiness: one for those who renounce the world and the other for those who live in it. This has never been completely assimilated as Christians.

### Christian monasticism

Early Christian asceticism is intimately linked with Christian monasticism. Jewish asceticism had made its way into the early Church through the Essenes, ascetics living in the Jordan valley. It is believed that the Essenes might have been influenced by Indian and Greek asceticism. In Egypt itself we see asceticism flourishing as early as 340 B. C. Asceticism was part of the cult of Isis. We find recluses of the Serapion at Memphis about 170

24. Cf. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, p. 475

25. Read the article of Fr Paul Puthanangady in this number "The Language of Spirituality"—Ed.)

26. Cf. Plato: '*Timaeus*', 69-71



B. C. The Egyptian Church had suffered terrible persecutions especially in the second century under Dacius (250 A. D.). Many Christians were driven to seek refuge in the deserts to avoid persecution and dishonour.<sup>27</sup> When the persecutions ended and Christianity was made the official religion of the Empire, the Church became corrupt owing to close association with the State. A greater asceticism, it was thought, was necessary to gain heaven in the place of martyrdom. Christian eremitism was the answer. The solitaries of the Egyptian deserts and the coenobites living in communities, vied with one another in the practice of severe penances. Virginity was considered the highest state of life. Origen exhorted the Alexandrians to asceticism and flight from the world. Macarius of Egypt was the leader of the Anchorites (solitaries) while Pachomius organized the coenobitic (community) life. Mortification took an extreme form among the solitaries of Syria. The "grazers" among them lived on grass. Some were known as "weepers". The stylites perched on pillar-tops like birds. The hermits generally slept sitting. The hesychast or the "silent ones" (*munis*) kept perpetual silence. They prayed and worked hard in the fields. Some Syrian hermits used to carry heavy stones as a form of penance. This custom still exists among the Syrian Catholics of Kerala during their pilgrimage to Kurisumala.

Extreme forms of penance and self-inflicted mortifications did not produce the desired spiritual purification. On the contrary, the hermits and monks of the Egyptian and Syrian deserts had agonizing experiences in fighting temptations especially against purity. It may legitimately be assumed that this was a nervous reaction against unnatural repression of all human emotions. According to Victor Frankle's logotherapy, *meaningful* endurance of pain is not pathological. But self-inflicted pain may cause psychic and nervous disorders and in the spiritual field it causes a subtle erosion of humility.

### Christian meaning of pain

There is definitely nothing "Christian" about self-chosen penance. Unlike Stoicism, Christianity does not glorify pain for its own sake. Pain has only a sacramental value for us. It is,

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27. Cf. M. Smith, *The way of the Mystics* p. 13



in fact, the cosmic sacrament which the whole of mankind must receive. It is a universal Baptism (Lk 12, 50). In this respect Christianity differs from Buddhism and magical religions. The Buddha explained away the reality of pain. Professor Suzuki contrasts the death of Christ and Buddha. Christ died a violent death in the vertical position, reeling between two boddhi trees. For Christianity pain is real. It has an eschatological value. It is the prelude to the Paschal Mystery. Christ's existential solution to the problem of pain and suffering on the cross completes the theology of pain adumbrated in the book of Job. In Christ, "suffering has become an expression of true love; and no love can be true and genuine unless it is expressed through the medium of suffering".<sup>28</sup>

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28. S. Lyngdon, *Notes on Job*, p. 219



# The Spirituality of Niskama Karma

The spiritual teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* is generally known as the ideal of *Niṣkāma Karma*: doing one's dutiful actions with out desire for their fruits. *Karma* includes all kinds of action such as performance of one's duties, actions simply as a part of social relationships and finally actions directed toward the worship of God. Since action is basic to any change in this world *Karma* is necessary for producing foodstuffs as well as invoking the blessings of God on man. Action which is directed towards invoking blessing from God is called *yajña*, sacrifice, which on the part of man is a participation in the initial *Yajña* performed by God himself while he was creating the universe.<sup>1</sup>

## Sadhana of Niskama Karma

From time immemorial man's ultimate concern in Hindu tradition has been understood in terms of *ānanda* (happiness) which is rendered very often by the term *mokṣa* (liberation). In past ages *mokṣa* was thought of as achievable both in this life and in the next provided a man carries out right actions. The consequence of not doing them according to the traditional moral precepts of the *ācāryas* was condemnation to rebirth. Hence right action according to the prescriptions of one's state of life was considered a *sādhana*, means of final emancipation.

According to the *Bhagavad Gita* man's final emancipation is *nirvāṇa* into Brahman,<sup>2</sup> which means the state of intimate union with God. This is attained when man achieves a state of con-

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1. *Rg-Veda* X, 129, 4

2. *Esha brāhmī stitih pārtha nai 'nām prāpya vimuhyati; Sthivā'syām antakāle 'pi brahma nirvānam rccati* (*Gita* II, 72. "This O Partha, is the Brahman state. Attaining this, none is bewildered. Being established in it even at the death-hour, a man gets into oneness with Brahman."



sciousness called *sthitaprajña*,<sup>3</sup> the state of being well established in God. At this stage of mental harmony the person feels completely disposed in God with full contentment of mind against all opposites. Often this state of mental peace was reserved to a few *sanyāsis*. But as a matter of fact the *Bhagavad Gita* prescribes this spiritual goal for all people as an ordinary *sādhana*: for the military man at the war front, like Arjuna and for a responsible family man or a political person like Mahatma Gandhi. The *sādhana* or *karma-mārga* (the path of action) consists in faithful performance of the duties of one's station in life. These duties are manifold: some are *svadharma* (personal duties), others are *paradharma*, which include duties directed to the members of society as well as to God. The ideal of performing these duties is called *niṣkāma-karma*: doing one's duties without attachment to rewards.

*Niṣkāma-karma* literally means "desire-less action". It is not to be misunderstood as indifferent or uninterested action so far as the performance is concerned. "Desirelessness" concerns the fruit or reward of the action and is supposed to proceed either spontaneously from the completion of the action or as a "gift" of God. In either case real altruism is freedom from the "attachment" that man is inclined to have towards his actions. *Niṣkāma karma* is fundamentally altruistic in its orientation. Its implication is that every action is service rendered to others and is self-rewarding. A spontaneous satisfaction in having done one's duty for the good of others and for the "right order of things" (*dharma*) is itself the first and the best reward. A warrior's duty is to fight in the defence of the country and his people, and it is self-rewarding in the sense that the purpose of the action is to protect the rights of the people, and this purpose is fulfilled by the action of war. A soldier like Arjuna of the *Gita* does his duty and the performance alone is salutary to him. As the final

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3. *Prajaḥāti yadā kāmān sarvān pārtha manogātān;  
Atmany evā'tmanā tustah sthitaprajñas tado'cyate.*

(Gita II, 55)

"When a man abandons, O Partha, all the desires of the heart and is satisfied in the Self by the Self, then is he said to be one stable in wisdom."



goal of man is emancipation achieved by a suitable means, the *svadharma* and its *niṣkāma karma* is the self-rewarding *sādhana* for liberation. This is also the case of a teacher who teaches according to his right conscience. His satisfaction (emancipation) consists in the very performance of the action of teaching. In this sense the action is self-rewarding. Any attachment for further rewards vitiates his noble task.

The *Gita* goes further and states that in *niṣkāma karma* there is a degree of performance which is highly silent. It appears to be "action-in-inaction" (*karmāṇi akarmah*) and "inaction-in-action" (*akarmani karmah*).<sup>4</sup> One cannot reach this state of "still-action" by refusing to start action (*anārabhya*) or by renouncing action (*sanyāsāt*),<sup>5</sup> for no one can remain without action even for a moment. Everybody is helplessly (*avaśāh*)<sup>6</sup> driven to action by innate tendency. Someone may outwardly restrain the organs of sense and action but might be mentally dwelling on objects of sense (*manasā smaran*).<sup>7</sup> Such a one who is always brooding over something and never keeps his mind pure can never reach *niṣkāma karma*. He is a deluded soul (*vimoodhātma*).<sup>8</sup> His externally pious behaviour is vain. If he wants to excel others in the *yoga* of action he should control his senses with his mind and remain unattached to sensual allurements of imaginative rewards of action.

### Psycho-spiritual effects of *niskama-karma*

In the light of the analysis of *niṣkāma-karma* as taught in the *Gita* the following psycho-spiritual effects may be deduced. By abandoning any imaginable rewards of action<sup>9</sup> the self of man becomes authentic and is not subordinated by the enjoyment of objects. *Niṣkāma karma* enables a man to surrender everything to the Lord of the universe. Man thus discovers a meaningful relationship of everything, because only in this surrender man becomes permanently content (*nitya truptah*).<sup>10</sup> This contentment

4. *Gita* IV, 18

5. *Gita* III, 4.

6. *Gita* III, 5

7. *Gita* III, 5

8. *Gita* III, 6

9. *Karma-samkalpa vivarjita* (*Gita* IV, 17)

10. *Nitya truptah; ātma trupta; ātma santuṣṭah* (Cf. *Gita* IV, 20 & III, 17).



is the state of having obtained that which is unsought; and thereby a man is also free from jealousy, because he has nothing more to realize. Competition arises only at imperfect levels of achievement, and this itself implies attachment. In the final surrender of all fruits of one's action to God no competition with any equal exists, or the bondage of jealousy. This state of contentment is the level of transcendence of all opposites like joy and sorrow, want and plenty. It supposes that a man who has reached *nişkāma karma* possesses a harmony of mind, an equilibrium which is not disturbed by either failure or success.<sup>11</sup>

A higher spirituality is envisaged in *nişkāma-karma* when actions are all performed as participation in the work of God<sup>12</sup> with the idea of continuing His creative sacrifice. Since God expends tremendous energy in every action which is a continuation of his primordial sacrifice (*yajña*), man co-operates with God when he performs *nişkāma-karma* for the welfare of the universe. He imitates God's self-less creative action. In this context every action of a man receives a tremendous potential of power from the creative action of God. This is the liberative force of *nişkāma-karma*. Once the action duly performed is surrendered to God it is transformed into a divine action performed by man but purified by God by reason of its orientation to God. So man, in order to be liberated from the bondage of the possible birth-death cycle, has to perform all his actions with his self fixed on God.<sup>13</sup> In short it is by dedicating all his actions to God, together with their natural results, merits or demerits, that man finds a meaning in his life. It is the meaning of liberation through the path of action (*karma-mārga*).<sup>14</sup>

Any action of a man's has purely natural effectiveness as well as inherently spiritual or religious significance, derived from the fact that the potency of his action is a gift of God. If man does not offer his action as *yajña* (sacrifice) to God he is a thief because he is selfish. He arrogates the efficiency of his action to himself. Whatever is done from selfish motives is done for self-

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11. *Samah sidhau-asidhau* (Gita IV, 22)

12. *Brahmakarma* (Gita IV, 24).

13. *Brahmani sthitah* (Gita IV, 20)

14. *Yoga-sannyāsā karmānām* (Gita IV, 41)



satisfaction. This is contradictory to *niṣkāma-karma*. Offering anything, especially actions, as a sacrifice to God is an expression of one's gratefulness to Him for His gifts.

### Niskama karma and atmasaksatkara

When a man performs his proper duties (*syadharma*) as an individual as well as his duties to his fellow beings (*paradharma*) there from the natural results accrue to him. They become his by the fact of his having realized the potentiality of the authentic self of man. This realization is called *ātmasākṣātkāra* which requires the following dispositions in action :

- control of the external sense organs<sup>15</sup>
- control of the internal faculties including the mental<sup>16</sup>
- keeping oneself detached from undue influences<sup>17</sup>
- an equanimous attitude to opposite conditions in life
- performing sacrificial actions without selfish motives
- seeking delight in God alone and being content with Him
- freeing one's self from possessiveness
- finally dedicating every action to the Supreme Self, the Lord of the Universe (*Prajāpati*), with a devout mind (*ādhyātma-cēta*).<sup>18</sup>

Even after cultivating these dispositions, desires for temporal reward may sometimes creep into our deeds because of the lower levels in the purification of a man's mental state. The *Gita* suggests the means of "autosuggestion" constantly to be practised by the aspirant. This is a psychological technique by which a man is constantly made conscious of the psychic adjuncts of his constitution. The fact that a man is constituted of three *gunas* (psychic adjuncts) which condition and disturb the balance in man, is brought to his consciousness. To know that "action" is always initiated by the *rajoguna* and that it predominates in the psycho-somatic level of existence causing undue inclinations to sensual objects, is the best precaution against possible disturbances. It helps a man to keep a watch over his senses so that they may not, at any time, get out of control. It

15. *Gita* III, 6

17. *Gita* III, 9

16. *Gita* III, 7

18. *Gita* III, 30



requires the knowledge of another fact about the process of cognition, namely that the seat of desire is sense-impulse which impels the mind to go out of itself in search of possessing the object of sensibility.

*Atmasāksātkāra* is the state of realization of the integrity of the self as when it is no longer lured by the objects of sensibility or disturbed by any factor in one's constitution. While virtuous actions liberate a man from the bondage of bodily existence vicious actions drive him more and more strongly towards material existence. Constant striving towards virtuous actions at all times leads to final discriminative knowledge of the subtleties of human bondage. Finally only right knowledge of the reality of the self as distinct from bodily adjuncts as well as the psychic factors of *guna* can elevate the self to higher plane of simplicity (*kevalatva*). But constant engagement in the right performance of actions purifies the consciousness of man which in turn enlightens the self. At this level as fire destroys all impurities and reduces the fuel to ashes, so the fire of knowledge purifies the soul and reduces its actions to *sākṣātkāra*.<sup>19</sup>

As time passes, one who is in quest of the Supreme Reality by means of *niṣkāma karma* realizes Its presence in his soul and attains supreme peace (*param śanti*).<sup>20</sup> At the level of inner peace man feels an ulterior form of renunciation already achieved in selfhood; at the level of consciousness he transcends the pairs of opposites to the extent of neither hating anything nor desiring anything. His mind is fixed on God who can satisfy his full being. He is a *jīteन्द्रya*, a conqueror of his senses, and he is also a *vijitātma*, a victor over his own body. At this stage of one's integrity one feels that he is fully in God who is *Sat-Cit-Ananda* (Pure Existence-Consciousness-Bliss). At this stage he is untouched by sins caused by actions as the lotus leaf remains untouched by water. His intellect is highly intuitive and capable of focusing its attention solely on God. Fully devoted to Him, he is well established in God. The final *sākṣātkāra* is union with God (*Brahma-nirvāṇa*).<sup>21</sup>

19. *Gita* IV, 37

20. *Gita* IV, 39

21. *Gita* V, 25-26



Thus *niṣkama-karma* leads man to self-realization (*ātma-sākṣātkāra*) which consists in final union with God as the Absolute of one's constant aspiration.

### A Christian understanding of *niṣkama-karma*

Christ in his person and actions is the best model of a *karma-yogi*. Throughout His life, right from His boyhood, He was conscious of his *dharma*. "Did you not know that I must be about my father's business"? (Lk 2:49). "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His work" (Jn 4:34). "I glorified Thee on earth having *accomplished the work* which Thou gavest me to do" (Jn 17:4). Even the death of Jesus was a surrender of his self to the Father and for mankind. Signifying this total commitment to the righteousness of mankind and to the good pleasure of the Father, Jesus said his last words. "After this Jesus, knowing that all things were now *accomplished* . . . . . said, 'It is consummated' (Jn 19:30), and crying out with a loud voice, 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit', he expired" (Lk 23:46).

In his lifetime he expected the same type of commitment to the cause of the kingdom of God and to selfless service of men from his own disciples: "Even so, you also when you have done everything that was commanded you, say, 'We are unprofitable servants; we have done what it was our duty to do'" (Lk 17:10). Further the whole purpose of his Sermon on the Mount was: "Seek you first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Mt 6:33). St Paul exhorted the Colossians in the same spirit of *niṣkāma-karma*: "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of Jesus Christ giving thanks to God the Father" Col 3:17).

It is a Christian's vocation and task (*dharma*) to be ready to serve his neighbour. The New Testament is a testament of *niṣkāma-karma*; selfless service motivated by love of Christ who set the example of action in service and love to mankind. Final commitment of every action together with its merits and demerits to the merciful love of God is *ātmasākṣātkāra* or meaningful



self-realization for man. Here the idea of glorifying God above everything is a symbol of submission to God, and in submission to God, one has to act for the welfare of others. *Niṣkama-karma* and *ātmasākṣātkāra* are mutually complementary. One without the other is meaningless and void. The New Testament of Love is also the Testament of service which requires real sacrificial self-giving on the part of man.

Even faith in God has not much ground unless it is proved by acts of charity. This is the core of Christianity. "What does it profit if a man says that he has faith and has not works? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled', without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself if it has no works is dead" (James 2: 14-17). The same is the comment on Christianity by St John, the Apostle: "If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in *deed* and in *truth*" (Jn 3: 17-18). In each of these situations as described by the Apostles of Christ, the mode of action must be utterly selfless, and a fulfilment of one's Christian duty arising out of his faith in Christ and God. This is *niṣkāma-karma*. Without performing this fundamental duty of his vocation (*svadharma*) man is not even a member of the Christian fellowship because the Christian vocation is essentially oriented to the love and service of one's fellow members. This is the *paradharma* which is co-extensive with *svadharma*, or rather, *svadharma* is here *paradharma* itself. The golden rule of Christianity, the rule of righteousness, is: "All that you wish men to do you, even so do you also to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets" (7: 12). The rule of conduct start with the motivation of self-love but ends with the sheer motivation of doing good to others only because others are good and you have to be good to them. It does not ask for further reward. This is the essence of the Christian understanding of *niṣkāma karma*. It sums up the whole Law taught by Moses and enunciated in the *Tora* (the Law) and interpreted by all the Prophets who came at different intervals in the Judeo-Christian Tradition of history.



Further, *niṣkāma karma* is the very fabric of the scroll of the whole Bible which Jesus summarizes in the following two immortal commandments:

*"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the FIRST commandment. And the second is like it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets"* (Mt 22: 37-40).

These commandments are very much man's basic orientations and ultimate concerns. Therefore to live accordingly and act in such a way as to find meaning in life (*ātmasākṣātkāra*) is man's *svadharma* according to the Christian vision, and it has to be achieved through action without selfish attachment.

Wardha  
Maharashtra

Prasannabhai



# Astanga Yoga in Christian Spiritual Discipline

Though traditionally *yoga* is known to be Hindu, it is by no means "Hindu" with any religious connotation. It is fundamentally a cultural discipline following a sound philosophy of man. In so far as this, presupposed in the *yoga* system, is fundamentally Christian, the discipline can be adopted in our system of spiritual training, so that it may be really indigenous and relevant to us. It is with this intention of developing an indigenous spiritual discipline for our candidates of religious institutes that the system of *aṣṭāṅga yoga* is presented here.

## Astanga Yoga

*Aṣṭāṅga yoga* literally means "union in eightfold steps." As a spiritual discipline for union with God *yoga* is part of our ancient cultural heritage. It has been accepted by all schools of Indian spirituality as an absolute *sine qua non* of final achievement in life. In fact, anything by which the highest goal in life is to be achieved is generally known as *yoga*. In this sense it is a necessary *sādhana* (means of realization) accompanying all others in the various schools of Indian spirituality.

Academically there are two main interpretations of the term *yoga*; one is "meditation" (from the root *yuj samādhau*) and the other is simply "union" from the root *yujir yoge*. By means of elaborate techniques of self culture, *yoga* as a universal *sādhana* embracing all aspects of life aims at sublimating man to divine experience. This is achieved by educating not only the conscious level of the self of man but also the sub-conscious level. "It covers all aspects of human life that lead to physical well-being, mental harmony and spiritual consciousness culminating in positive and lasting happiness and peace through the integration of personality."<sup>1</sup> It also operates by means of a transference of

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1. Shri. Yogendra, *Facts About Yoga*, The Yoga Institute, Santa Cruz, Bombay, 1971. p. 27



the principles of many allied disciplines such as physical training, personal hygiene, sanitation, dietetics, preventive medical discipline, autotherapy, applied psychology, psychosomatics, autohypnosis, mental hygiene and psychotherapeutics. *Yoga* remains within the limits of general ethics, the spiritual science of intuition, trance (mysticism) or transcendental consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

As a psychosomatic discipline for spiritual self-culture *aṣṭāṅga yoga* with all its eightfold techniques aims at the harmonious development of the aspirant leading him to mental peace and spiritual union with God. It is the one science that embraces many others like anatomy, physiology, neurology and psychology. The fundamental philosophy of man implied in Patanjali's *raja yoga* is that man is a complex being full of opposites, not always in the dichotomic order but in the trichotomic. This means that man is more than a simple combination of body and soul. He is the resultant of the interaction between matter and spirit; in the resultant stage he is at the psycho-somatic level of existence which is more than the sum total of the numerical qualities of the body and of the spirit taken separately. But both together constitute new operational qualities which are peculiar to the composite state of existence. The main operational level is consciousness (*cit*).

According to Patanjali the founder of the *yoga darśana* the consciousness of man is always subject to modification and that causes distorted modes in his personality. These are generally known as *asmita* (egoism) *rāga* (sensuousness) *dveṣa* (repulsion) and *abhiniveśa* (attachment to life). These are the *vṛddhis* (wrong modification) of the *cit*. Hence the yoga system of Patanjali is defined as *cittavṛddhi nirodha*.<sup>3</sup> It is the discipline which checks the modification of the *cit* (translated often as mind). Since the principle of unity of the composite being of man is self, one may understand this modification as that of the human self at its operational level which is expressive in the mental faculty of consciousness. Hence Patanjali continues that when the mind is controlled the self of man is in its native condition. In this native condition the self recognizes its similarity with the Supreme Self (God).

2. cf. *Ibid.* p. 27-28

3. Patanjali, *Aphorisms of Yoga*, I:2



The modification of the mind takes place owing to the disturbance of the equilibrium of the psychic adjuncts, namely, the three qualities: *satva*, *rajas* and *tamas*.<sup>4</sup> *Satva* is purity, goodness, harmony, light and wisdom. *Rajas* is passion, action and motion, and *tamas* is inertia, darkness and ignorance. An internal fight goes on between *satva* and *rajas-tamas*. This is the tension which man always feels, because of which one is inclined to cry out like St. Paul: "It is not the good that I wish to do I do, but the evil that I wish not, I do" (Rom. 7:19)- The function of *aṣṭāṅga yoga* is to convert *tamas* into *rajas* through meditation.<sup>5</sup> Hence it is a complete *sādhana* because it is aimed at the complete control of self by the aspirant and this helps him to realize the holiness of God.

### Steps of astanga yoga

The eightfold steps of the spiritual culture are the following:<sup>6</sup>

1. *yama* (social discipline),
2. *niyama* (individual discipline),
3. *āsana* (posture),
4. *prāṇāyama* (control of bio-energy),
5. *pratyāhāra* (abstraction),
6. *dhāraṇa* (concentration)
7. *dhyāna* (meditation)
8. *samādhi* (experience of union).

Of these the first five constitute the psychosomatic part of the discipline and they are rather remote preparations (*bahiranga*) for external conditioning of the self with reference to its association with the body. The remaining three constitute the psycho-spiritual part of the discipline. They remain purely at the psychic level (*antaranga*) Their mutual interplay increases physical, moral and mental purity, as each of them is auxiliary to the next nearest.

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4. *Ibid.* I : 12-17

5. Swami Sivananda, *Fourteen Lessons in Raja Yoga*, A Divine Life Society Publication, Rshikesh, 1970, p. 4

6. Patanjali, op. cit. II : 29



All the eight steps together refer primarily to the refining process required of man for union with God. It is an evolutionary process of discipline which touches every level of conscious existence. Hence the *yoga* system is called positively *citasuddhi* in contrast to its negative operation as *cittavṛddhi nirodha*. The highest degree of purification is one of realization of identity of the consciousness of man with that of God.

### Spiritual goal

The last step of *aṣṭāṅga yoga* i. e., *samādhi* (union) is definitely God-experience and it is a far superior degree of consciousness which transcend the visual (*pratyāhāra*), conceptual (*dhāraṇa*) and intuitive (*dhyaṇa*) levels of consciousness. Yoga transcends the moral and psychological levels of existence and reaches the goal of total liberation. It reaches the degree of experience of the unity of pure consciousness at the deeply immanent level of man's being. In Christian terminology this is the experience of the ultimacy of the Divine either in its transcendental Reality of one God as the Absolute or in the Logos-form Christ, as the expression of the *Cit* of God, His Consciousness, or in the "Motive Force" of the Self of man i. e., the Holy Spirit who remaining in man, makes him say "Abba", Father? "The Spirit himself gives testimony to our spirit that we are sons of God" (Rom. 8 : 15-16).

The spiritual goal is the attainment of the perfect state of consciousness *sthitaprajña* where man realises his absolute freedom of the spirit while he is engaged in the body and engaged in the material affairs of day to day life. The Gita has a suitable wording for this state of realization :

Then his soul is a lamp whose light is steady, for it burns in a shelter where no winds come; When the mind is resting in the stillness of the prayer of Yoga, and by the grace of the Self the self of man is satisfied in the Self; when he feels that the supreme bliss which is perceived by the intelligence and which transcends the senses, and where-in established he never moves from the Reality (Gita VI : 19-21).



At a deep level of human existence man encounters the Supreme Self and here yoga leads man from disharmony or fragmentary existence, to the harmony which is an experience of authenticity. This is a degree of achievement of having passed from suffering to joy, from blindness to the vision of Light, from instability to a calm abiding in Truth. Such a transcendental illumination is a great challenge to the Christian experience,<sup>7</sup>

### The way, the truth and the life

For a Christian, Christ is the way that leads to the goal, which is the Father; he is also the truth to be realized on the way to the Father; again; it is the life of Christ that is the human channel through which the grace of the Father flows to man. Hence the Christian believes that in Christ's humanity, the full content of the divine nature lives, and in union with him we have been given full life (Col. 2:9-10). The way contains the experience of the goal. This principle is also implied in the *aṣṭāṅga yoga* discipline. In yoga the fundamental approach is a search for the unity of the human and the Divine. The Divine is not a denial of the human nor is it to be realized through annihilation of the human; on the contrary, at the apex of the balance of the human elements is the Divine made known, and in the harmony of nature the Divine manifests itself. As the aspirant goes on walking along the path of *yoga* he is taken nearer and nearer to the Divine; and this process is an interior process of self-culture.

Though the first half of the eight-fold path is mainly physical training while the second half is a mental discipline both are intertwined by the spiritual quest that runs through the core of all the stages of the ascent. This is to say that the goal is already on the way. The experience of the goal is already in the *sādhana*. The integration that is the goal is also grasped in the early stages of the practice of yoga. To advance on the path is to experience the integration of the mental and the spiritual in the physical itself. At the same time to follow the eight-fold way is not merely to have eight slender threads of pure Consciousness

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7. Pearl Drego, *Pathways to Liberation*, The Grail, New Delhi, 1974. p. 20



which underlies every stage, the knowledge of which grows stronger as ultimate experience itself becomes the goal. In a sense, the path of *yoga* is the incarnation of *samadhi*.<sup>8</sup>

1. *Yama* (Social discipline) : The first step to spiritual experience is to rectify the social existence of man. It is a system of training in the five social virtues, namely :<sup>9</sup>

- (a) *ahimsa* (non-violence)
- (b) *satya* (truthfulness)
- (c) *asteya* (non-stealing)
- (d) *bramacarya* (continence)
- (e) *aparigraha* (non-coveting)

According to Purohit Swami's commentary non-violence is love for all creatures; non-stealing is love for one's neighbour; non-covetousness is maintaining the dignity of oneself; telling the truth is maintaining the dignity of society; continence is not exploiting sex for one's own pleasure. The basic insight of the fivefold *yama* is that all life is sacred, and all life is one; no one has a right to question the sacredness of another; no one has a right to commit violence against another.

The aspirant who wants to find the unity of life should not break that unity by *thought*, *word* or *deed*. It is for self-preservation, the natural instinct in man, that violence is forbidden. The same principle applies to stealing. Whatever belongs to man, belongs to him because he has earned it. Nobody else has a right to it. Stealing is physical while covetousness is mental. The aspirant who wants to control his mind, should control his desire, his passion, his greed, that he may not steal in his heart. When man refuses to covet, refuses to steal, in any sense refuses to be violent, he speaks the truth.<sup>10</sup> A true Christian should not inflict pain on any being "so that no one pays back wrong for wrong, but all times make it your aim to do good to one another and to all people" (I Thes. 5 : 15). So the first step to *yoga*, namely *yama*, means that an aspirant should be tolerant,

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8. *Ibid.* p. 22

9. Patanjali, op. cit. II : 30

10. Cf. Shri Purohit Swami, *Aphorisms of Patanjali*, Faber, London, 1973, p. 52



restrained and non-hurting; over and above that, he should not even call any human being idiot or fool. This is the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount. Without a thorough training in this morality of natural truthfulness and honesty and human respect nobody can reach any spiritual gain. The social dimension of human existence has to be rectified first and that should be our primary concern in any religious training and this is *yama*.

2. *Niyama* (Individual discipline): While the *yamas* are more of the nature of restraints in social morality, *niyamas* build up positive attitudes. *Niyamas* refer to the individual's personal morality and integrity. They too are five:

- (a) *sauca* (cleanliness)
- (b) *santoṣa* (contentment),
- (c) *tapas* (self-control by austerity)
- (d) *swadyaya* (personal study of the scriptures),
- (e) *Iṣwara pranidhāna* (devotion to the Lord)<sup>11</sup>

*Sauca* aims at total cleanliness external as well as internal, in thought, word and deed; purity of the body and mind. *Santoṣa* means being content with what comes to one as good or bad, taking it in one's stride, and being calm in all matters. *Tapas* means balanced asceticism such as fasting, silence, self-restraint, and steadiness in following consistently the *sādhana* one undertakes to follow.

3. *Asana* (posture): According to Patanjali, *āsana* means a posture which is steady and comfortable (*sthira-sukham āsana*).<sup>12</sup> Only a relaxing posture is good for meditation. The importance given to *āsana* is based on sound health, and hygienic and psychotherapeutic reasons. Since yoga does not neglect the role of the body for meditation, it rightly emphasizes a comfortable bodily posture for concentration. The centre of gravity of the body has to be fixed normally so that without exertion the mind can pay full attention to the object of meditation. Healthy care of the body is an integral part of mental balance. The yoga postures, especially the simpler ones prescribed for meditation, namely, *sidhāsana*, *sukhāsana*, *padmāsana* and *vajrāsana* are suitable

11. *Ibid.* II: 32

12. Patanjali, op. cit. II: 46 & 47



for deepening the innermost bonds between the human physique and psyche. For meditation the same posture should be kept consistently.

4. *Prāṇayāma* (control of breathing): *Prāṇa* means vital principle and *yāma* means control. From very ancient time *prāṇa* was understood as the life principle imparted to man by God and hence as part of God (Gn. 2: 7). This inner principle is also understood as life-energy or bio-energy. When this energy is controlled, a man achieves a higher potential of concentration. This concentration makes him highly conscious of the most interior level of his being. For a Christian the most interior level of being is the Holy Spirit who dwells in man. This Spirit works out the liberation of man from within. Since God has given His Spirit to man, through the same Spirit, man can get into the abyss of the mystery of God. By controlling the physical *prāṇa* man tries to get into the same channel of breathing as the Spirit and then to God who dwells in the inner sanctuary of man. This interiorisation process stresses the need of gradual control of the frequency of breath, so that the mind may smoothly rest in God, and enjoy mental peace in the "cave of the heart".

5. *Pratyāhāra* (withdrawal of the senses): Withdrawal of the senses from sense objects to the centre of our being is not denial of the material world. It is bringing everything of the universe to the centre of human consciousness so that together with the world in which we are we may focus our attention on the Reality within this universe. This is bringing the whole of creation in a visual form to the mind where the mind finds its harmony with the universe and it situates itself at its centre as its reflective principle. In fact we have nothing to bring from outside but only to make ourselves conscious of our inner harmony with creation. Thus *pratyāhāra* is the visualization of the whole cosmic context of our meditation as converging on the mind of man while man feels his situation at the centre of the world.

The withdrawal of the senses has been compared to the return of sun-rays at sunset and to the way in which tortoise, hides in its shell at the notice of external dangers.<sup>13</sup>

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13. Pearl Drego, op. cit. p. 145-146



“As when darkness falls, the rays of the setting sun seem all to become one in its circle of light, though at the hour of sunrise they all spread out again, even so all the powers of the senses become one with the higher power of the mind” (*Praśna* Up. 4).

“When in recollection one withdraws all the senses from the attraction of the pleasures of sense, even as a tortoise withdraws all its limbs, then is wisdom serene” (*Gita*, II: 58).

In this state of recollection (*pratyāhāra*) a religious person can see his favourite deity as the centre of attention; a Christian can visualize Christ as the centre of all consciousness, as he is the “One light which enlightens everyone”.

6. *Dhāraṇa* (Concentration): In *dhāraṇa* the degree of consciousness awakened by *pratyāhāra* is sharpened by concentrating on a particular physical centre or a psychic centre called *chakra* such as the *bhrumadhyam* the point between the eye-brows. *Dhāraṇa* means concentrating on this centre where the outer world and the inner world, the external senses and the internal senses meet in a point. It is said that at this stage of attention the inner senses slowly stop their function and a degree of stillness is felt.

7. *Dhyāna* (Meditation): *Dhyāna* means a continuous meditation or deep thinking beyond the mind, at the apex of the buddhi, intellect. *Dhyāna* prepares a man for the realization of the human self and the Divine Self. It is the immediate step to *samādhi*.

8. *Samādhi* (Contemplation): This is the stage of inner union of the consciousness of man with the consciousness of God who is *Sat-Cit-Ananda*. The *cit* (consciousness of man) as the reflection of the *Cit* of God, encounters the source and falls back upon it and remains at the same level of transparency. Sankaracharya calls this state the experience of the “*advaita*” (non-duality), the fourth degree of consciousness (*turiya*). Sankara never asserts that God and man are the same but only states that they are “not two”. But this is a mode of predication about a



non-conceptual experience of a deeper union. Buddha calls this state of conceptless consciousness *nirvana* or *śūnyata*, emptiness. The Jains call it *Kaivalya*, extreme simplicity. In itself this experience is the partial realization of the "Fullness" of the Self by the self of man. It is such an experience that is worded in the Upanishads:—

"That one is Fullness; and this is also fullness;  
From the Fullness fullness doth proceed;  
When the fullness is withdrawn from the Fullness,  
What remains is again Fullness" (Br. Up. 5, 2).

Of course, it has its opposite pole of experience also. The man who reaches this state also experiences "his own emptiness" and feels his nothingness in the lustre of the *Svayamprakāśa* who is the only one that enlightens everyone else. At this one can assert "I am Brahman", completely denying himself. Mark the words of Christ "I and the Father are one". "He who sees me sees the Father". Paul could say, "It is not I who live, but Christ lives in me"! Here the version is in the language of emptying or kenosis. It is unto this supreme realization of unity with God in this world that Christ leads his followers and that is the meaning of the prayer Christ made to the Father "that they all may be *one in us as you are in me and I in you*" (Jn 17:21).

## Conclusion

*Aṣṭāṅga* yoga is not merely a technique of self-emancipation. It is a complete vision comprising a theory and its practice in achieving true freedom of the spirit. It has a sound philosophy of man which can be further enriched by Christian revelation. An Indian who is a recipient of the Revelation of the Spirit within himself, is more attuned to the vibrations of this One Spirit and can be better culturally conditioned to respond to the call for liberation. Hence in our centres of religious training, like the novitiate, a spiritual discipline in the line of *aṣṭāṅga Yoga* can be experimented with.



# Yoga and the Reversal of the Fall

All over the world the interest in Yoga is steadily increasing. Secular as well as sacred circles spend years in studying and practising yoga. Hinduism sees yoga as a technic for meditation, as a philosophy of life and above all as a means of liberation. Yoga is said to be threefold. It embraces one's works, thoughts and love. Accordingly yoga is known as *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga* and *bhaktiyoga*.

How does yoga relate itself to the Christian vision of man? How can we integrate the insights and instructions of yoga in working out the Christian ideal of salvation? Christianity believes in Christ as the redeemer, the liberator of mankind. But the Christian, though radically redeemed by Christ, has to work out his own salvation with personal care and dedication.

The Christian seeks salvation. Yoga promises liberation. The Christian salvation and the yogic liberation are not one and the same but mutually complementary. In fact yoga is aimed at working out an exact reversal of the Fall from which the Christian wants to be saved.

## I. The Fall and the existential predicament of man

All religions agree that man is now in a situation that is predicamental. There is something wrong with him. He is not the ideal he should be. His existential realization is somehow lower than what is expected of him. In contemporary language he is said to be inauthentic. Christianity considers this predicamental situation of man the result of sin which is radically founded in the original Fall of mankind.

What is the essence of this predicament? Predicament primarily speaks of an estrangement, an alienation from himself. Man is estranged. To be estranged means he is supposed to be



united with something from which he is now alienated. Man should be united with the Absolute which is the source of his ultimate meaning. But unfortunately he is alienated, separated from this Supreme Being. This is what we call sin. Simultaneously he is separated from himself and his fellowmen. The Christian theologian Paul Tillich makes a profound analysis of the inner nature of this estrangement. According to him the fundamental characteristics of this state of estrangement are: unfaith, pride (*hubris*) and concupiscence. This threefold version of estrangement is nothing but an unfolding of the basic structure of estrangement which consists in a turning away from God, a turning in upon oneself and a turning to the 'things' of the world.

Unbelief is not to be confused with the unwillingness or inability to believe the doctrines of the Church.<sup>2</sup> Rather it is to be understood as the most fundamental attitude of an intelligent being turning away from God. There is already a big gap between the creature and his Creator. This gap of infinite dimension is bridged by the real and authentic faith of man in his Creator.<sup>3</sup> When man falls into the state of unbelief it is precisely this faith that is at stake. Because it is a turning away, unbelief is also un-love. It is not the same as self-love, because any inordinate self-love already presupposes a certain degree of un-love resulting from the state of unbelief. Unbelief is, therefore, 'unfaith', a state of estrangement both in terms of faith and of love.

Once man's inner attitude is characterised by unbelief, *hubris* (pride) is its natural sequence. Tillich defines *hubris* as 'the self-elevation of man into the sphere of the divine.'<sup>4</sup> In other words in the state of *hubris* man seeks to seat himself upon the throne of God whom he has dethroned. Man can rise up to this venture, because he sees in himself something of divine splendour.

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1. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. II (Welwyn: James Nisbet & Co., 1968), pp. 53 ff.

2. *ibid.*, p. 54.

3. Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), p. 167.

4. *Systematic Theology*, p. 57.



This is the 'image of God' in him.<sup>5</sup> Structurally too man is the most self-centred being. Endowed with consciousness he is consciously integrating everything into himself, and building up a world of his own setting it in ever-growing new values and meaning.<sup>6</sup> But 'this perfection is at the same time his temptation.'<sup>7</sup> In the overwhelming emphasis of his self-affirmation he forgets the radical finitude of his nature and thus his self-affirmation turns to be self-elevation or self-deification. Authentic self-affirmation belongs to the ontological structure of man and it will be a grave injustice to deprive him of it. This radical self-affirmation is not self-love in the pejorative sense of the word. Rather it is a kind of 'self-acceptance' which every man is bound to have.<sup>8</sup> But in *hubris* the ontological self-affirmation ceases to be the legitimate self-acceptance man is entitled to and assumes instead a form of 'self-deification' by which 'he elevates himself beyond the limits of his finite being and provokes the divine wrath which destroys him.'<sup>9</sup> As R. C. Zaehner puts it 'it is man's own arrogant conceit that he is sufficient in himself to control and direct his new-found consciousness that precipitates his Fall and throws him into internal disarray'.<sup>10</sup>

Deprived of his divine centre and enclosed in his own finite self man makes a desperate attempt to enlarge his self by way of unlimited abundance. This tendency of man is 'concupiscence'. Concupiscence is often understood in a very limited sense referring to man's desire for sexual pleasures. Concupiscence is here understood in an ontological sense. It means an 'unlimited desire to draw the whole of reality into one's own self'.<sup>11</sup>

Man, being finite, is always in quest of his wholeness. He can find it only in relating himself with other beings, including

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5. *Genesis*, 1. 26, 27.

6. Cf. F. Vadakethala, *Discovery of Being*, pp. 43-44.

7. *Systematic Theology*, p. 56.

8. Paul Tillich, *Ultimate Concern* (New York : Harper and Row, 1965), p. 216.

9. *Systematic Theology*, p. 57.

10. R. C. Zaehner, *The Convergent Spirit* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 71.

11. *Systematic Theology*, p. 59.



God. This kind of inter-relationship with other beings is natural to him, because this is the way of transcending one's limitation. But in concupiscence inter relationship remains very superficial, not reaching the real depth of the other being one encounters. Nor is any order kept or limit set in the greedy hunting after beings, physical as well as spiritual. He represents the aesthetic man of Kierkegaard<sup>12</sup> or the inauthentic man of the first reflection of Marcel.<sup>13</sup> He is miserably cut off from the depth of meaning of his own being and of others as well, and thereby is left to the possibility of being totally imprisoned in his finitude.

In the history of philosophy we find two typical examples of conceptual descriptions of concupiscence. They are Freud's theory of libido and Nietzsche's theory of the will to power. The underlying movement of both these philosophies is the same: the unlimited desire of the self. Both Nietzsche and Freud have contributed quite a lot to the understanding of man and his psychosomatic dynamisms. But remaining only in the sphere of the estranged man both fail to explain him in his completeness. Neither Nietzsche's 'will to power' nor Freud's 'libido' transcends the tragic element of concupiscence in man.

Sin as unbelief, *hubris* and concupiscence, the three forms of existential estrangement, gives us a fair picture of man's inauthentic existence, as existentialists would like to call it. He is deprived of his ground and fails to discover himself and his world in its profundity. Enjoying life in its superficiality he is drifted along the waves of the anonymous world and is bound to break up as rocks of reality present themselves.

The Fall as unfaith, *hubris* and concupiscence reminds us of the Indian twin-concepts of *avidyā* and *karma*. According to the

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12. S. Kierkegaard, *Either Or* (Princeton : University Press 1944), *passim*.

13. Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, Vol. I., Eng. Trans. by G. S. Fraeser (London : Harwill Press, 1950), pp. 77-102, 103-147.



Indian way of thinking, the association of the individual self<sup>14</sup> (soul) with the body is regarded as bondage. It is bondage, because it restricts the freedom of the self, which is essentially spiritual and God-like. By itself the individual self is capable of participating in the divine bliss, but because of the body, which is of a material nature (*prakṛti*), it becomes attached to matter and to the pleasures and pains arising therefrom.<sup>15</sup> Body is, thus, the bondage of the self. Though essentially eternal and blissful, existentially the individual self is in bondage. This is the tragedy of man, the sad predicament he finds himself in.

This state of bondage is characterized by ignorance (*avidyā*). Ignorance is the basic misapprehension of the self about itself. Owing to this ignorance false tendencies develop, and these confirm the self in its state of ignorance. Ignorance is related to work (*karma*). The state of bondage which is the state of ignorance is considered to be the result of one's own past *karma*, the beginning of which is not known. In the state of bondage ignorance inspires *karma*, *karma* brings about rebirth and rebirth again a new series of *karma*. Thus, according to the Hindu belief, the *karma*-bound transmigration goes on and on. It is from this cycle of births and deaths that man seeks liberation.

*Avidyā* as the misapprehension of the self includes the elements of unfaith and pride. In unfaith, as we have already seen, man turns away from God who is his divine centre and inner core. In *avidyā* man fails to see the true nature of his self which is either one with Brahman (Sankara) or similar to Brahman (Ramanuja). Man in *avidyā* is led by the wild fancies of his own Ego and thus is in a state of pride or *hubris*. He falsely identifies himself with the outward layers of his experience. In doing so, he goes out of himself and his inner controller who is God. Since man is the reflection of God, by going out of himself he looses himself and his God. This reminds us once again

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14. *Jiva*: Both Indian and Western authors have translated the word *jīva* or *jīvātmen* as 'soul'. It is often translated also as 'the individual self' in contrast to the Supreme Self which is Brahman. For a discussion on *jīva* cf. Srinivāsadāsa, *Yadīndra-mātadīpika* (Madras : Ramakrishna Math, 1967), pp. 102-121.

15. The *Bhagavadgītā*, 14. 5-9.



that the estrangement of the self was an alienation from itself as well as its divine centre. Turned away from God and turned in upon himself, man engages himself in innumerable acts (*karma*) in order to satiate his own evil desires. But *karma* binds because man in bondage is not yet free from attachment to matter. As long as attachment to matter remains in him, he will find himself again in matter (rebirth). Thus *karma* prolongs his existence in bondage. The binding *karma*, with its implied meaning of passionate desire for the result of the action, reminds us of the concupiscence, the third characteristic note of the man in estrangement. Thus the existential man is either in estrangement or in bondage and is led by unfaith, pride, and concupiscence or by *avidyā*, *karma* and *punarjanma*.

## II. Yoga and the Reversal of the Fall

The essence of the Fall of mankind is estrangement. Estrangement consists in man's radical turning away from God (unfaith) and turning to himself (*hubris*) and to his world of matter (concupiscence). Christ came to redeem man from his state of estrangement. Redemption consisted in reunion and reconciliation of man with God. Thus man became justified before God. If the core of Christian justification is the reunion of the separated and divine acceptance, wherever there is the experience of union with God, the justifying grace of Christ is also at work. The Hindu experience of union with God, is certainly beyond question. The Hindu takes it for granted that every man of good will is justified before God, that is, is acceptable before him. Hinduism lays greater emphasis on the other pole of the question, namely, liberation of man from earthly entanglements, which are the real hindrance to the working of the divine grace. Man has to discover himself and his own divine centre, and integrate himself there. For this Hinduism proposes its threefold yoga. This can be immensely useful for a Christian as well.

If attachment to matter was the cause and the result of the original Fall, this Fall is to be overcome by way of detached activity. This is the purpose of *karmayoga*. If ignorance, and pride arising therefrom, are characteristics of existence in bondage, they are to be overcome by true and authentic knowledge of the self. This is the purpose of the *jñānayoga*. If estrangement as sepa-



ration of man from God is the basic result of the Fall, this is to be overcome by reunion. This is the purpose of *bhaktiyoga*. Detached activity keeps man away from the allurements of the material world, and the knowledge of the self shows him what he is in himself. The enlightened self finds its bliss in loving union with God. Thus all the three yogas play their important roles in overcoming the man's existential predicament brought about by the Fall.

### 1. The importance of Karmayoga

*Karmayoga* is by and large a discipline by which the reversal of the Fall is aimed at. It is the process of self-amendment which will be rewarded disintegrated by God in due time. It is the re-integration of the personality, because in the Fall the personality was *re-integrated*. The re-integration is worked out by a process of new orientations. This is the specific purpose of *karmayoga*.

*Karmayoga* is no lesson in inactivity. On the contrary it is an art of a 'holy way' of doing things only for God. In our analysis of the Fall we saw that one of the characteristic notes of estrangement was concupiscence which was defined as the unlimited desire to draw the whole of reality into one's own self.<sup>16</sup> The passion of desire is to be uprooted by dispassionate activity, and this is the message of *karmayoga*.

Action as such is of indifferent value, It is desire and attachment to the result of action that matter. As Franklin Edgerton puts it 'desire or passion is more fundamental than action'.<sup>17</sup> Action or work is, therefore, not something wrong. Performed selflessly it can even become salvific, a means for final release. But desire is binding. Action binds through desire. Action binds when it is done in ignorance of the real self and the body is mistaken for the self. Action binds again by making the self believe that it is the real agent of work which it is not. From the very outset of his history man finds himself action-bound (*karmabadhah*).

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16. *Systematic Theology*, p. 57.

17. Franklin Edgerton, *The Bhagavadgītā* (New York : Harper and Row, 1964), p. 159.



In order to free himself from this bondage of karma he has to perform action in a new spirit. He has to reverse the process. If action with attachment caused its bondage the self has to strive for release by performing action with detachment. Detached activity becomes the threshold of salvation.

With body, mind, soul and senses alone—and-isolated (from the self) do men engaged in spiritual exercise engage in action renouncing attachment for the cleaning of the self.<sup>18</sup>

Action is to be performed in the spirit of detachment. This is what makes *karma* a *karmayoga*. *Karmayoga* is, thus, 'renunciation in action and not renunciation of action'<sup>19</sup> Of the two states of action and non-action the *Gītā* recommends that of action<sup>20</sup>, but action with the spirit of perfect detachment. One has to renounce not only the result of action but also the title of agency. In fact man is not the agent of the action. In the last analysis action belongs to God alone.

'Cast all your works on me' your thoughts (withdrawn) in what appertains to self; have neither hope nor thought that 'this is mine': cast off this fever: Fight!<sup>21</sup>

*Karmayoga* demands a radical renunciation, an uncompromising spirit of giving up. This has already been suggested in the *Gītā* before.<sup>22</sup> But by merely giving up one may not advance in the spirit of perfect detachment. As Prof. Zaehner puts it 'a more fruitful way of "giving-them-up" is here suggested: giving them up by casting them on the Lord.'<sup>23</sup> In doing so man remains true to himself. He acknowledges the real agent of the work who is God. Commenting on the versicle quoted above Ramanuja writes:

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18. The *Bhagavadgītā*; Eng. Tran. by R. C. Zaehner (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1969), 5. 11.

19. N. S. Anatharangācar, *The Philosophy of Sādhana in Viśiṣṭādvaita* (Mysore : University of Mysore, 1967), p. 104.

20. The *Bhagavadgītā*, 5. 2.

21. *ibid.*, 3. 30.

22. *ibid.*, 3. 4.

23. R. C. Zaehner, *The Bhagavadgītā*, p. 172.



Therefore, make over to me who am the Supreme Person, all activities regarding them as being done by Me, by meditating on the form of self as to be set into activity by Me only on account of its being My body. And perform them, looking upon them merely as acts of worship to Me. Becoming free from hope in regard to their fruits and hence free from any thought that they are yours, perform actions like fighting in the war without the fever (of anxiety).<sup>24</sup>

In giving up works to God man is giving them up to the very source they came from. In asking man to work in a dispassionate spirit the *Gita* demands of man that he should be like God in his works. For 'the truly perfected man resembles God both in his unutterable tranquillity and spontaneous activity'.<sup>25</sup> And this is the high ideal the *Gita* asks man to strive for. We see here a kind of dilemma: on the one hand there is work which ensures liberation or spiritual freedom. On the other hand there is transcendence of all works which is the state of repose in liberation. The eternal rest that is of the nature of God can only be won by acting like God, viz. by acting without being involved. In spite of his action man should remain unattached.

The teaching of the *Gita* is, therefore, not any kind of inaction; but detached activity. It is true that, this activity does not primarily mean, social work. It is the ritual acts of the devotee. But the detached activity recommended in *karmayoga* may well be extended to all the kinds of work man is supposed to do. Ramanuja clearly mentions in his *Gītabhāṣya* that the caste-duties are to be included in the works to be performed dispassionately. Duties of the caste include different kinds of work. Thus a *brahmin* has to study the Vedas; a *kṣatriya* has to fight for the defence of his country; a *vaiśya* has to perform commercial activities; and a *śudra* has to do his menial tasks. Strictly speaking, the *Gita* does not set aside any job as not appropriate for acquiring sanctity. What it does insist on is the eradication of all attachment to matter and material things, even in the very

24. Ramanuja, *Gītabhāṣya* 3. 30. Eng. Tra. by M. R. Sankaran (Madras : Vidya Press, 1969), p. 100.

25. R. C. Zaehner, *The Bhagavadgītā*, p. 18.



act of performing a task. The caste-duties are divided into four major groups: the priestly, the kingly, the commercial and the menial. With necessary alteration in details, we still have these types of division in any modern society: the religious men, defence personnel, the businessmen, and the paid employees. In the traditional terminology all their work is basically in the form of caste-duties and thus not against the path of salvation delineated in the *Gita* provided they are performed in a spirit of detachment. The idea of detachment may seem to be overemphasized. But what the *Gītā* is presenting is the ideal. And is it not possible that a divinely illumined man can act without any desire for what is perishable and non-eternal?

## 2. The importance of Jnanayoga

Oliver Lacombe compares the problem of *karma* with that of faith and works in the Christian religion.<sup>26</sup> The Hindu *vidya* or *jñāna* is a spiritual wisdom which dispels the darkness of ignorance. The Christian faith is also a spiritual wisdom by which darkness is dispelled. 'The Word was the true light that enlightens all men, a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower.'<sup>27</sup> 'By ignorance is wisdom overspread,'<sup>28</sup> says the *Gītā*. This is true as far as the existential man is concerned. Unfaith was a characteristic of such a man. But the evangelist presents another man whom ignorance could not overpower. He is the essential man. As the Word of God made flesh, he is the Wisdom (Logos) incarnate. Unwisdom has no part in him. As the underlying base of man's very self, this wisdom is in every man. Man is the image of this Wisdom. This Wisdom in him has to be rediscovered. This is the purpose of the *jñānayoga*. Actually it is the re-discovery of his own self.

If ignorance is what constitutes the tragic state of man, salvation must naturally consist in the elimination of it. Elimination of ignorance is at the same time illumination by truth, the discovery of the real self of man. Salvation, therefore, is also a liberation from ignorance and all that is tied up with it. Ninian

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26. Olivier Lacombe, *L'Absolu selon le Vedānta* (Paris : P. Geuthner, 1937), p. 332.

27. *John*, 1.9,5.

28. The *Bhagavadgītā*, 5. 15.



Smart explains this ignorance and the knowledge which dispels it as follows:

Now this ignorance is not of course simple ignorance. It is not failure to know the dates of important battles or lack of grasp of relativity. It is not essentially a spiritual ignorance, a failure to see the truth existentially in spiritual experience. Consequently liberation takes the form of a kind of insight or knowledge. Again this is not mundane knowledge. It is not a matter of learning up doctrines. It is not being good at mathematics (though there is no need to despise such a skill). It is spiritual knowledge.<sup>29</sup>

In Christian thinking this spiritual knowledge assumes a new dimension of faith in Christ, and of seeing all things from the point of view of salvation history. Since thus history is not something extrinsic to man, and since the very Logos of Christ indwells also in man, this spiritual knowledge can well be intensified by way of introspective meditation. By yogic meditation, man concentrates on his own self, which because it is the image of the Word of God, is similar to God. In the state of estrangement, man, led by pride, dethroned God and set himself on the throne of God. Now, illumined by spiritual knowledge, he sees his real self, of which God is the real centre. Meditation integrates man into this divine centre and thus heals him and makes him whole, and this is very essential to salvation. Man has to rediscover the unity which he has lost on account of the forces of nature working upon him. Matter, as we experience it now, is divisive. The more a man is under the power of his own spirit, the greater is the unity in him. Meditation, by concentrating on the self, the image of the Word of God in man, restores the unity of man which was lost in the Fall. Man goes back to his divine centre and integrates himself and the world into it.

Integration is obtained by way of spiritual illumination. This spiritual illumination is at the same time man's divine transformation. This may be explained in the light of the dynamism

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29. Ninian Smart, *The Yogi and the Devotee* (London : George Allen and Unwinn, 1968), pp. 156-157.



of human knowledge. Meditation is a kind of spiritual knowledge. Every knowledge works out the transformation of the subject into the object. The subject intentionally becomes the object, that is knowledge. The capacity of the spirit is that it can incessantly become something else and return to itself in order to become again something else. Its capacity is thus potentially infinite. Whenever it knows something it becomes that which it knows. This is the structure of the human mind and of knowledge as an act of the mind. The structure of the mind remains the same, even when one knows God. The human mind puts on the form of God in so far as God is the object of its knowledge. God is not the direct object of our knowledge here, and, therefore, the mind does not take the form of God in its fullness. But all true knowledge is an approximation to the form of God, because God is Truth itself. In the knowledge obtained by and through faith, this approximation is still closer, because by faith we come to know the God who has revealed himself to us more intimately. The process of man's divine transformation is in every bit of human knowledge; it is much more in the knowledge God by faith. Meditation is one of the sacred realms in which we have the experience of this spiritual knowledge.

Spiritual knowledge which dispels the ignorance of man, has also a transcendental character. Integrated in his divine centre transformed to his divine form, he undergoes a kind of transcendental awareness. In monistic systems this awareness is explained as the awareness of the self as the All or as Brahman. Cosmic consciousness is often explained as a form of this transcendental awareness. In theistic systems, however, this transcendental awareness assumes the form of friendship with God. This takes us to the next question.

### 3. The importance of Bhaktiyoga

*Bhakti* is loving devotion as well as loyalty in love. By *bhakti*, man participates in the Being of God and communes with Him. One of the tragic results of the Fall was man's separation from God. This separation is overcome by communion. This is the purpose of *bhaktiyoga*. Ramanuja understands this communion not as self's identity with Brahman but as the union of the self with Brahman, who is a personal God. *Bhakti*-



*yoga* strongly favours the concept of the personal God. That God is a Person does not stand in the way of his being the Ground of all. The word 'Person' is applied to God only analogically, or symbolically. By calling God a Person what we really mean is that God, who is intelligent by nature, can know and love his creatures, and man who is a person can communicate with God intelligently and love him personally.

God, for Ramanuja, is the soul or the supreme centre of all beings. God, for Tillich, is the ultimate ground of all beings. As 'soul' and ground, God is immanent in all. Still both Tillich and Ramanuja regard God as personal, because this God is also transcendent and can personally communicate with man. All divine communication is through the medium of the Word which makes God personal.

In *bhaktiyoga* the individual self encounters the Supreme Self as an 'Absolute Thou' and surrenders itself unreservedly for His service. Here the self's turning in upon itself and to the world of concupiscence is reversed. It comes back to its divine centre and remains in communion with it. Having practised the art of detached activity and having acquired a high degree of self-knowledge, the self is now in a position to orientate itself to God in a much more meaningful way. God becomes the meaning and the goal of its being. This God is not reality impersonally conceived, but the God who personally communicates himself to his devotee. Meditation is no longer simply the intuitive vision of self, but, characterized by loving devotion, becomes the continued remembrance of the beloved. The ecstasy of the yogin turns out to be the ecstasy of the devotees. This is the type of meditation Ramanuja urges, a meditation characterized by love. Ramanuja, thus, overcomes the split between intellectualism and voluntarism in spiritual life.

Love is the uniting force in the divine Trinity. As abiding Spirit in man, the same love-force guides man, who was separated from his divine centre, back to God.

In true devotion (*bhakti*) man rises above himself, and overcomes his finitude in union with the Infinite. Thus, *bhakti* brings about a transcendental awareness in man, an awareness



of being united with God who is his beloved. In the sacred realm of the newly awakened consciousness, the devotee sees everything in a new light. This is the transformed consciousness of the devotee, because, through *bhakti*, the devotee participates in the consciousness of God. 'Sanctification is not possible without a continuous transcendence of oneself in the direction of the ultimate - in other words, without participation in the holy<sup>30</sup>. Thus, according to Tillich, the transcendence itself is participation in the holy. This is precisely what is done in *bhaktiyoga*. The word 'bhaj' the root of *bhakti* also means 'to participate in'.<sup>31</sup> Participation brings transformation along with it. The transformation process begun in *jñānayoga* reaches its higher degrees of realization in *bhaktiyoga*, because in *bhakti* love unites the individual self to God in such a way that the individual self decreases and God increases. In devotional love, however, the individuality of the self is never denied, but completely transformed into the divine. Man becomes divinely transparent.

The divine transparency is, therefore, the key to the sanctification of man, the culmination of the salvation-process. 'The state of saintliness is the state of transparency toward the divine ground of being.<sup>32</sup> Man is the expression of the divine Logos. The Logos is in him as the very basis of his being and of his life. The expressibility of the Logos in man is, therefore, in a position of constant increase and decrease. Hence John the Baptist said 'He must increase, but I must decrease'.<sup>33</sup>

The Logos manifests itself in conscience. The awareness of agreement or disagreement of our action with the abiding Logos is the voice of conscience. The Fall as a fact or as a predicament is the possibility of man's discarding the Logos or living in a general oblivion of It. The Fall as act, on the other hand, is the refusal of man to conform to this abiding Logos. There he

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30. *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III., p. 250.

31. For an etymological study of the word *bhakti*. Cf. M. Dhavamany, *Love of God according to Saiva Siddhānta* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 13-23.

32. *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III., p. 231.

33. John. 3. 30.



tarnishes the entire transparency of the Logos. This is sin. Such a man lives in separation from God and prolongs his state of estrangement. Yoga as the reversal of the Fall, aims at the revival of the divine transparency of man. In the blissful light of this divine transparency, the integrated man, the yogin, who is also a *bhakta*, finds God in himself and himself in God.

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